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A WOMAN'S THOUGHTS

ABOUT

WOMEN.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"JOHN HALIFAX, GENTLEMAN,"

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A WOMAN'S THOUGHTS ABOUT WOMEN.

CHAPTER I.

Something To Do.

I PREMISE that these thoughts do not concern married women, for whom there are always plenty to think, and who have generally quite enough to think of for themselves and those belonging to them. They have cast their lot for good or ill, have realised in greater or less degree the natural destiny of our sex. They must find out its comforts, cares, and responsibilities, and make the best of all. It is the single women, belonging to those supernumerary ranks, which, political economists tell us, are yearly increasing, who most need thinking about.

First, in their early estate, when they have so much in their possession — youth, bloom, and health giving them that temporary influence over the other sex which may result, and is meant to result, in a

permanent one. Secondly, when this sovereignty is passing away, the chance of marriage lessening, or wholly ended, or voluntarily set aside, and the individual making up her mind to that which, respect for Grandfather Adam and Grandmother Eve must compel us to admit, is an unnatural condition of being.

Why this undue proportion of single women should almost always result from over-civilisation, and whether, since society's advance is usually indicated by the advance, morally and intellectually, of its women — this progress, by raising women's ideal standard of the "holy estate," will not necessarily cause a decline in the very *un*holy estate which it is most frequently made — are questions too wide to be entered upon here. We have only to deal with facts — with a certain acknowledged state of things, perhaps incapable of remedy, but by no means incapable of amelioration.

But, granted these facts, and leaving to wiser heads the explanation of them — if indeed there be any — it seems advisable, or at least allowable, that any woman who has thought a good deal about the matter, should not fear to express in word — or deed, *which is better,* — any conclusions, which out of her

own observation and experience she may have arrived at. And looking around upon the middle classes, which form the staple stock of the community, it appears to me that the chief canker at the root of women's lives is the want of something to do.

Herein I refer, as this chapter must be understood especially to refer, not to those whom ill or good fortune — *query*, is it not often the latter? — has forced to earn their bread; but "to young ladies," who have never been brought up to do anything. Tom, Dick, and Harry, their brothers, has each had it knocked into him from school-days that he is to do something, to be somebody. Counting-house, shop, or college, afford him a clear future on which to concentrate all his energies and aims. He has got the grand *pabulum* of the human soul — occupation. If any inherent want in his character, any unlucky combination of circumstances, nullifies this, what a poor creature the man becomes! — what a dawdling, moping, sitting-over-the-fire, thumb-twiddling, lazy, ill-tempered animal! And why? "Oh, poor fellow! 'tis because he has got nothing to do!"

Yet this is precisely the condition of women for a third, a half, *often* the whole of their existence.

That Providence ordained it so — made men to work, and women to be idle — is a doctrine that few will be bold enough to assert openly. Tacitly they do, when they preach up lovely uselessness, fascinating frivolity, delicious helplessness — all those polite impertinences and poetical degradations to which the foolish, lazy, or selfish of our sex are prone to incline an ear, but which any woman of common sense must repudiate as insulting not only her womanhood but her Creator.

Equally blasphemous, and perhaps even more harmful, is the outcry about "the equality of the sexes;" the frantic attempt to force women, many of whom are either ignorant of or unequal for their own duties — into the position and duties of men. A pretty state of matters would ensue! Who that ever listened for two hours to the verbose confused inanities of a ladies' committee, would immediately go and give his vote for a female House of Commons? or who, on the receipt of a lady's letter of business — I speak of the average — would henceforth desire to have our courts of justice stocked with matronly lawyers, and our colleges thronged by

"*Sweet girl-graduates* with their golden hair?"

As for finance, in its various branches — if you pause to consider the extreme difficulty there always is in balancing Mrs. Smith's housekeeping-book, or Miss Smith's quarterly allowance, I think, my dear Paternal Smith, you need not be much afraid lest this loud acclaim for "women's rights" should ever end in pushing you from your stools, in counting-house, college, or elsewhere.

No; equality of the sexes is not in the nature of things. Man and woman were made for, and not like one another. One only "right" we have to assert in common with mankind — and that is as much in our own hands as theirs — the right of having something to do.

That both sexes were meant to labour, one "by the sweat of his brow," the other "in sorrow to bring forth" — and bring up — "children" — cannot, I fancy, be questioned. Nor, when the gradual changes of the civilised world, or some special destiny, chosen or compelled, have prevented that first, highest, and in earlier times almost universal lot, does this accidental fate in any way abrogate the necessity, moral, physical, and mental, for a woman to have occupation in other forms.

But how few parents ever consider this? Tom, Dick, and Harry, aforesaid, leave school and plunge into life; "the girls" likewise finish their education, come home, and stay at home. That is enough. Nobody thinks it needful to waste a care upon them. Bless them, pretty dears, how sweet they are! papa's nosegay of beauty to adorn his drawing-room. He delights to give them all they can desire — clothes, amusements, society; he and mamma together take every domestic care off their hands; they have abundance of time and nothing to occupy it; plenty of money, and little use for it; pleasure without end, but not one definite object of interest or employment; flattery and flummery enough, but no solid food whatever to satisfy mind or heart — if they happen to possess either — at the very emptiest and most craving season of both. They have literally nothing whatever to do, except to fall in love; which they accordingly do, the most of them, as fast as ever they can.

"Many think they are in love, when in fact they are only idle" — is one of the truest sayings of that great wise bore, Imlac, in *Rasselas*, and it has been proved by many a shipwrecked life, of girls especially. *This "falling in love"* being usually a mere delusion

of the fancy, and not the real thing at all, the object is generally unattainable or unworthy. Papa is displeased, mamma somewhat shocked and scandalised; it is a "foolish affair," and no matrimonial results ensue. There only ensues — what?

A long, dreary season, of pain, real or imaginary, yet not the less real because it is imaginary; of anger and mortification, of impotent struggle — against unjust parents, the girl believes, or, if romantically inclined, against cruel destiny. Gradually this mood wears out; she learns to regard "love" as folly, and turns her whole hope and aim to — matrimony! Matrimony in the abstract; not *the* man, but any man — any person who will snatch her out of the dulness of her life, and give her something really to live for, something to fill up the hopeless blank of idleness into which her days are gradually sinking.

Well, the man may come, or he may not. If the latter melancholy result occurs, the poor girl passes into her third stage of young-ladyhood, fritters or mopes away her existence, sullenly bears it, or dashes herself blindfold against its restrictions; is unhappy, and makes her family unhappy; perhaps herself cruelly conscious of all this, yet unable to find the true root of

bitterness in her heart: not knowing exactly what she wants, yet aware of a morbid, perpetual want of something. What is it?

Alas! the boys only have had the benefit of that well-known juvenile apophthegm, that

> "Satan finds some mischief still
> For idle hands to do:"

it has never crossed the parents' minds that the rhyme could apply to the delicate digital extremities of the daughters.

And so their whole energies are devoted to the massacre of old Time. They prick him to death with crochet and embroidery needles; strum him deaf with piano and harp playing — *not* music; cut him up with morning-visitors, or leave his carcass in ten-minute parcels at every "friend's" house they can think of. Finally, they dance him defunct at all sort of unnatural hours; and then, rejoicing in the excellent excuse, smother him in sleep for a third of the following day. Thus he dies, a slow, inoffensive, perfectly natural death; and they will never recognise his murder till, on the confines of this world, or from the unknown shores of the next, the question meets them: "What *have you done* with Time?" — Time, the only mortal

gift bestowed equally on every living soul, and, excepting the soul, the only mortal loss which is totally irretrievable.

Yet this great sin, this irredeemable loss, in many women arises from pure ignorance. Men are taught as a matter of business to recognise the value of time, to apportion and employ it: women rarely or never. The most of them have no definite appreciation of the article as a tangible divisible commodity at all. They would laugh at a mantua-maker who cut up a dress-length into trimmings, and then expected to make out of two yards of silk a full skirt. Yet that the same laws of proportion should apply to time and its measurements — that you cannot dawdle away a whole forenoon, and then attempt to cram into the afternoon the entire business of the day — that every minute's unpunctuality constitutes a debt or a theft (lucky, indeed, if you yourself are the only party robbed or made creditor thereof!): these slight facts rarely seem to cross the feminine imagination.

It is not their fault; they have never been "accustomed to business." They hear that with men "time is money;" but it never strikes them that the same commodity, equally theirs, is to them not money, perhaps,

but *life* — life in its highest form and noblest uses — life bestowed upon every human being, distinctly and individually, without reference to any other being, and for which every one of us, married or unmarried, woman as well as man, will assuredly be held accountable before God.

My young-lady friends, of from seventeen upwards, your time, and the use of it, is as essential to you as to any father or brother of you all. You are accountable for it just as much as he is. If you waste it, you waste not only your substance, but your very souls — not that which is your own, but your Maker's.

Ay, there the core of the matter lies. From the hour that honest Adam and Eve were put into the garden, not — as I once heard some sensible preacher observe — "not to be idle in it, but to dress it and to keep it," the Father of all has never put one man or one woman into this world without giving each something to do there, in it and for it: some visible, tangible work, to be left behind them when they die.

Young ladies, 'tis worth a grave thought — what, if called away at eighteen, twenty, or thirty, the most of you would leave behind you when you die? Much *embroidery, doubtless*; various pleasant, kindly, illegible

letters; a moderate store of good deeds; and a cart-load of good intentions. Nothing else — save your name on a tombstone, or lingering for a few more years in family or friendly memory. "Poor dear ——! what a nice lively girl she was!" For any benefit accruing through you to your generation, you might as well never have lived at all.)

But "what am I to do with my life?" as once asked me one girl out of the numbers who begin to feel aware that, whether marrying or not, each possesses an individual life, to spend, to use, or to lose. And herein lies the momentous question.

The difference between man's vocation and woman's seems naturally to be this — one is abroad, the other at home: one external, the other internal: one active, the other passive. He has to go and seek out his path; hers usually lies close under her feet. Yet each is as distinct, as honourable, as difficult; and whatever custom may urge to the contrary — if the life is meant to be a worthy or a happy one — each must resolutely and unshrinkingly be trod. But — *how?*

A definite answer to this question is simply impossible. So diverse are characters, tastes, capabilities and circumstances, that to lay down a distinct line of

occupation for any six women of one's own acquaintance, would be the merest absurdity.

"Herein the patient must minister to herself."

To few is the choice so easy, the field of duty so wide, that she need puzzle very long over what she ought to do. Generally — and this is the best and safest guide — she will find her work lying very near at hand: some desultory tastes to condense into regular studies, some faulty household quietly to remodel, some child to teach, or parent to watch over. All these being needless or unattainable, she may extend her service out of the home into the world, which perhaps never at any time so much needed the help of us women. And hardly one of its charities and duties can be done so thoroughly as by a wise and tender woman's hand.

Here occurs another of those plain rules which are the only guidance possible in the matter — a Bible rule, too — "*Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.*" Question it not, philosophise not over it — do it! — only *do it!* Thoroughly and completely, never satisfied with less than perfectness. Be it ever *so great or so small*, from the founding of a village-

school to the making of a collar — do it "with thy might;" and never lay it aside till it is done.

Each day's account ought to leave this balance — of something done. Something beyond mere pleasure, one's own or another's — though both are good and sweet in their way. Let the superstructure of life be enjoyment, but let its foundation be in solid work — daily, regular, conscientious work: in its essence and results as distinct as any "business" of men. What they expend for wealth and ambition, shall not we offer for duty and love — the love of our fellow-creatures, or, far higher, the love of God?

"Labour is worship," says the proverb: also — nay, necessarily so — labour is happiness. Only let us turn from the dreary, colourless lives of the women, old and young, who have nothing to do, to those of their sisters who are always busy doing something; who, believing and accepting the universal law, that pleasure is the mere accident of our being, and work its natural and most holy necessity, have set themselves steadily to seek out and fulfil theirs.

These are they who are little spoken of in the world at large. I do not include among them those whose labour should spring from an irresistible im-

pulse, and become an absolute vocation, or it is not worth following at all — namely, the professional women, writers, painters, musicians, and the like. I mean those women who lead active, intelligent, industrious lives: lives complete in themselves, and therefore not giving half the trouble to their friends that the idle and foolish virgins do — no, not even in love-affairs. If love comes to them accidentally, (or rather providentially,) and happily, so much the better! — they will not make the worse wives for having been busy maidens. But the "tender passion" is not to them the one grand necessity that it is to aimless lives; they are in no haste to wed: their time is duly filled up; and if never married, still the habitual faculty of usefulness gives them in themselves and with others that obvious value, that fixed standing in society, which will for ever prevent their being drifted away, like most old maids, down the current of the new generation, even as dead May-flies down a stream.

They have made for themselves a place in the world: the harsh, practical, yet not ill-meaning world, where all find their level soon or late, and where a frivolous young maid sunk into a helpless old one, *can no more expect to* keep her pristine position than

a last year's leaf to flutter upon a spring bough. But an old maid who deserves well of this same world, by her ceaseless work therein, having won her position, keeps it to the end.

Not an ill position either, or unkindly; often higher and more honourable than that of many a mother of ten sons. In households, where "Auntie" is the universal referee, nurse, playmate, comforter, and counsellor: in society, where "that nice Miss So-and-so," though neither clever, handsome, nor young, is yet such a person as can neither be omitted nor overlooked: in charitable works, where she is "such a practical body — always knows exactly what to do, and how to do it:" or perhaps, in her own house, solitary indeed, as every single woman's home must be, yet neither dull nor unhappy in itself, and the nucleus of cheerfulness and happiness to many another home besides.

She has not married. Under Heaven, her home, her life, her lot, are all of her own making. Bitter or sweet they may have been — it is not ours to meddle with them, but we can any day see their results. Wide or narrow as her circle of influence appears, she has exercised her power to the uttermost, and for good.

Whether great or small her talents, she has not let one of them rust for want of use. Whatever the current of her existence may have been, and in whatever circumstances it has placed her, she has voluntarily wasted no portion of it — not a year, not a month, not a day.

Published or unpublished, this woman's life is a goodly chronicle, the title-page of which you may read in her quiet countenance; her manner, settled, cheerful, and at ease; her unfailing interest in all things and all people. You will rarely find she thinks much about herself; she has never had time for it. And this her life-chronicle, which, out of its very fulness, has taught her that the more one does, the more one finds to do — she will never flourish in your face, or the face of Heaven, as something uncommonly virtuous and extraordinary. She knows that, after all, she has simply done what it was her duty to do.

But — and when her place is vacant on earth, this will be said of her assuredly, both here and Otherwhere — "*She hath done what she could.*"

CHAPTER II.

Self-dependence.

"If you want a thing done, go yourself; if not, send."

This pithy axiom, of which most men know the full value, is by no means so well appreciated by women. One of the very last things we learn, often through a course of miserable helplessness, heart-burnings, difficulties, contumelies, and pain, is the lesson, taught to boys from their school-days, of self-dependence.

Its opposite, either plainly or impliedly, has been preached to us all our lives. "An independent young lady" — "a woman who can take care of herself" — and such-like phrases, have become tacitly suggestive of hoydenishness, coarseness, strong-mindedness, down to the lowest depth of bloomerism, cigarette-smoking, and talking slang.

And there are many good reasons, ingrained in the very tenderest core of woman's nature, why this should

be. We are "the weaker vessel" — whether acknowledging it or not, most of us feel this: it becomes man's duty and delight to show us honour accordingly. And this honour, dear as it may be to him to give, is still dearer to us to receive.

Dependence is in itself an easy and pleasant thing: dependence upon one we love being perhaps the very sweetest thing in the world. To resign one's self totally and contentedly into the hands of another; to have no longer any need of asserting one's rights or one's personality, knowing that both are as precious to that other as they ever were to ourselves; to cease taking thought about one's self at all, and rest safe, at ease, assured that in great things and small we shall be guided and cherished, guarded and helped — in fact, thoroughly "taken care of" — how delicious is all this! So delicious, that it seems granted to very few of us, and to fewer still as a permanent condition of being.

Were it our ordinary lot, were every woman living to have either father, brother, or husband, to watch over and protect her, then, indeed, the harsh but salutary doctrine of self-dependence need never be heard *of. But it is* not so. In spite of the pretty ideals of

poets, the easy taken-for-granted truths of old-fashioned educators of female youth, this fact remains patent to any person of common sense and experience, that in the present day, whether voluntarily or not, one-half of our women are *obliged* to take care of themselves — obliged to look solely to themselves for maintenance, position, occupation, amusement, reputation, life.

Of course I refer to the large class for which these Thoughts are meant — the single women; who, while most needing the exercise of self-dependence, are usually the very last in whom it is inculcated, or even permitted. From babyhood they are given to understand that helplessness is feminine and beautiful; helpfulness, — except in certain received forms of manifestation — unwomanly and ugly. The boys may do a thousand things which are "not proper for little girls."

And herein, I think, lies the great mistake at the root of most women's education, that the law of their existence is held to be, not Right, but Propriety; a certain received notion of womanhood, which has descended from certain excellent great-grandmothers, admirably suited for some sorts of their descendants, but totally ignoring the fact that each sex is composed

of individuals, differing in character almost as much from one another as from the opposite sex. For do we not continually find womanish men and masculine women? and some of the finest types of character we have known among both sexes, are they not often those who combine the qualities of both? Therefore, there must be somewhere a standard of abstract right, including manhood and womanhood, and yet superior to either. One of the first of its common laws, or common duties, is this of self-dependence.

We women are, no less than men, each of us a distinct existence. In two out of the three great facts of our life we are certainly independent agents, and all our life long we are accountable only, in the highest sense, to our own souls, and the Maker of them. Is it natural, is it right even, that we should be expected — and be ready enough, too, for it is much the easiest way — to hang our consciences, duties, actions, opinions, upon some one else — some individual, or some aggregate of individuals yclept Society? Is this Society to draw up a code of regulations as to what is proper for us to do, and what not? Which latter is suppose to be done for us; if not done, or there happ *to be no one to do it*, is it to be left undone? Ala

most frequently, whether or not it ought to be, it is!

Every one's experience may furnish dozens of cases of poor women suddenly thrown adrift — widows with families, orphan girls, reduced gentlewomen — clinging helplessly to every male relative or friend they have, year after year, sinking deeper in poverty or debt, eating the bitter bread of charity, or compelled to bow an honest pride to the cruellest humiliations, every one of which might have been spared them by the early practice of self-dependence.

I once heard a lady say — a tenderly-reared and tender-hearted woman — that if her riches made themselves wings, as in these times riches will, she did not know anything in the world that she could turn her hand to, to keep herself from starving. A more pitiable, and, in some sense, humbling confession, could hardly have been made; yet it is that not of hundreds, but of thousands, in England.

Sometimes exceptions arise: here is one: —

Two young women, well educated and refined, were left orphans, their father dying just when his business promised to realise a handsome provision for his family. It was essentially a man's business — in many points

of view, decidedly an unpleasant one. Of course friends thought "the girls" must give it up, go out as governesses, depend on relatives, or live in what genteel poverty the sale of the good-will might allow. But the "girls" were wiser. They argued: "If we had been boys, it would have been all right; we should have carried on the business, and provided for our mother and the whole family. Being women, we'll try it still. It is nothing wrong; it is simply disagreeable. It needs common sense, activity, diligence, and self-dependence. We have all these; and what we have not, we will learn." So these sensible and well-educated young women laid aside their pretty uselessness and pleasant idleness, and set to work. Happily, the trade was one that required no personal publicity; but they had to keep the books, manage the stock, choose and superintend fit agents — to do things difficult, not to say distasteful, to most women, and resign enjoyments that, to women of their refinement, must have cost daily self-denial. Yet they did it; they filled their father's place, sustained their delicate mother in ease and luxury, never once compromising their womanhood by their work, but rather ennobling the work by their doing

Another case — different, and yet alike. A young girl, an elder sister, had to receive for step-mother a woman who ought never to have been any honest man's wife. Not waiting to be turned out of her father's house, she did a most daring and "improper" thing — she left it, taking with her the brothers and sisters, whom by this means only she believed she could save from harm. She settled them in a London lodging, and worked for them as a daily governess. "Heaven helps those who help themselves." From that day this girl never was dependent upon any human being; while during a long life she has helped and protected more than I could count — pupils and pupils' children, friends and their children, besides brothers and sisters-in-law, nephews and nieces, down to the slenderest tie of blood, or even mere strangers. And yet she has never been anything but a poor governess, always independent, always able to assist others — because she never will be indebted to any one, except for love while she lives, and for a grave when she dies. May she long possess the one and want the other!

And herein is answered the "*cui bono?*" of self-dependence, that its advantages end not with the original possessor. In this much-suffering world,

woman who can take care of herself can always take care of other people. She not only ceases to be an unprotected female, a nuisance and a drag upon society, but her working-value therein is doubled and trebled, and society respects her accordingly. Even her kindly male friends, no longer afraid that when the charm to their vanity of "being of use to a lady" has died out, they shall be saddled with a perpetual claimant for all manner of advice and assistance; the first not always followed, and the second often accepted without gratitude — even they yield an involuntary consideration to a lady who gives them no more trouble than she can avoid, and is always capable of thinking and acting for herself, so far as the natural restrictions and decorums of her sex allow. True, these have their limits, which it would be folly, if not worse, for her to attempt to pass; but a certain fine instinct, which, we flatter ourselves, is native to us women, will generally indicate the division between brave self-reliance and bold assumption.

Perhaps the line is most easily drawn, as in most difficulties, at that point where duty ends and pleasure begins. Thus, we should respect one who, on a mission of mercy or necessity, went through the lowest por-

tions of St. Giles' or the Gallowgate; we should be rather disgusted if she did it for mere amusement or bravado. All honour to the poor sempstress or governess who traverses London streets alone, at all hours of day or night, unguarded except by her own modesty; but the strong-minded female who would venture on a solitary expedition to investigate the humours of Cremorne Gardens or Greenwich fair, though perfectly "respectable," would be an exceedingly condemnable sort of personage. There are many things at which, as mere pleasures, a woman has a right to hesitate; there is no single duty, whether or not it lies in the ordinary line of her sex, from which she ought to shrink, if it be plainly set before her.

Those who are the strongest advocates for the passive character of our sex, its claims, proprieties, and restrictions, are, I have often noticed, if the most sensitive, not always the justest or most generous. I have seen ladies, no longer either young or pretty, shocked at the idea of traversing a street's length at night, yet never hesitate at being "fetched" by some female servant, who was both young and pretty, and to whom the danger of the expedition, or of the late return alone, was by far the greater of the two. I have

known anxious mothers, who would not for worlds be guilty of the indecorum of sending their daughters unchaperoned to the theatre or a ball — and very right, too! — yet send out some other woman's young daughter, at eleven P. M., to the stand for a cab, or to the public-house for a supply for beer. It never strikes them that the doctrine of female dependence extends beyond themselves, whom it suits so easily, and to whom it saves so much trouble; that either every woman, be she servant or mistress, sempstress or fine lady, should receive the "protection" suitable to her degree; or that each ought to be educated into equal self-dependence. Let us, at least, hold the balance of justice even, nor allow an over-consideration for the delicacy of one woman to trench on the rights, conveniences, and honest feelings of another.

We *must* help ourselves. In this curious phase of social history, when marriage is apparently ceasing to become the common lot, and a happy marriage the most uncommon lot of all, we must educate our maidens into what is far better than any blind clamour for ill-defined "rights" — into what ought always to be the foundation of rights — duties. And there is one, the *silent practice of which* will secure to them almost every

right they can fairly need — the duty of self-dependence. Not after any Amazonian fashion; no mutilating of fair womanhood in order to assume the unnatural armour of men; but simply by the full exercise of every faculty, physical, moral, and intellectual, with which Heaven has endowed us all, severally and collectively, in different degrees; allowing no one to rust or lie idle, merely because their owner is a woman. And, above all, let us lay the foundation of all real womanliness by teaching our girls from their cradle that the priceless pearl of decorous beauty, chastity of mind as well as body, exists in themselves alone; that a single-hearted and pure-minded woman may go through the world, like Spenser's Una, suffering, indeed, but never defenceless; foot-sore and smirched, but never tainted; exposed, doubtless, to many trials, yet never either degraded or humiliated, unless by her own act she humiliates herself.

For heaven's sake — for the sake of "womanhede," the most heavenly thing next angelhood, (as men tell us when they are courting us, and which it depends upon ourselves to make them believe in all their lives) — young girls, trust yourselves; rely on yourselves! Be assured that no outward circumstances will harm

you while you keep the jewel of purity in your bosom, and are ever ready with the steadfast, clean right hand, of which, till you use it, you never know the strength, though it be only a woman's hand.

Fear not the world: it is often juster to us than we are to ourselves. If in its harsh jostlings the "weaker goes to the wall" — as so many allege is sure to happen to a woman — you will almost always find that this is not merely because of her sex, but from some inherent qualities in herself, which, existing either in woman or man, would produce just the same result, pitiful and blameable, but usually more pitiful than blameable. The world is hard enough, for two-thirds of it are struggling for the dear life — "each for himself, and de'il tak the hindmost;" but it has a rough sense of moral justice after all. And whosoever denies that, spite of all hindrances from individual wickedness, *the right* shall not ultimately prevail, impugns not alone human justice, but the justice of God.

The age of chivalry, with all its benefits and harmfulnesses, is gone by, for us women. We cannot now have men for our knights-errant, expending blood and life for our sake, while we have nothing to do but sit *dle on balconies,* and drop flowers on half-dead victors

at tilt and tourney. Nor, on the other hand, are we dressed-up dolls, pretty playthings, to be fought and scrambled for — petted, caressed, or flung out of window, as our several lords and masters may please. Life is much more equally divided between us and them. We are neither goddesses nor slaves; they are neither heroes nor semidemons: we just plod on together, men and women alike, on the same road, where daily experience illustrates Hudibras's keen truth, that

"The value of a thing
Is just as much as it will bring."

And our value is — exactly what we choose to make it.

Perhaps at no age since Eve's were women rated so exclusively at their own personal worth, apart from poetic flattery or tyrannical depreciation; at no time in the world's history judged so entirely by their individual merits, and respected according to the respect which they earn for themselves. And shall we value ourselves so meanly as to consider this unjust? Shall we not rather accept our position, difficult indeed, and requiring from us more than the world ever required before, but from its very difficulty rendered the more honourable?

Let us not be afraid of men; for that, I suppose, lies at the root of all these amiable hesitations. "Gentlemen don't like such and such things." "Gentlemen fancy so and so unfeminine." My dear little foolish cowards, do you think a man — a *good* man, in any relation of life, ever loves a woman the more for reverencing her the less? or likes her better for transferring all her burdens to his shoulders, and pinning her conscience to his sleeve? Or, even supposing he did like it, is a woman's divinity to be man — or God?

And here, piercing to the Foundation of all truth — I think we may find the truth concerning self-dependence, which is only real and only valuable when its root is not in self at all; when its strength is drawn not from man, but from that Higher and Diviner Source whence every individual soul proceeds, and to which alone it is accountable. As soon as any woman, old or young, once feels *that*, not as a vague sentimental belief, but as a tangible, practical law of life, all weakness ends, all doubt departs: she recognises the glory, honour, and beauty of her existence; she is no longer afraid of its pains; she desires not to shift one atom of its responsibilities to another. She is

content to take it just as it is, from the hands of the All-Father; her only care being so to fulfil it, that while the world at large may recognise and profit by her self-dependence, she herself, knowing that the utmost strength lies in the deepest humility, recognises, solely and above all, her dependence upon God.

CHAPTER III.

Female Professions.

GRANTED the necessity of something to do, and the self-dependence required for its achievement, we may go on to the very obvious question — *what* is a woman to do?

A question more easily asked than answered; and the numerous replies to which, now current in book, pamphlet, newspaper, and review, suggesting everything possible and impossible, from compulsory wifehood in Australia to voluntary watchmaking at home, do at present rather confuse the matter than otherwise. No doubt, out of these "many words," which "darken speech," some plain word or two will one day take shape in action, so as to evolve a practical good. In the meantime, it does no harm to have the muddy pond stirred up a little; any disturbance is better than stagnation.

These Thoughts — however desultory and unsatisfactory, seeing the great need there is for deeds

rather than words — are those of a "working" woman, who has been such all her life, having opportunities of comparing the experience of other working women with her own: she, therefore, at least escapes the folly of talking of what she knows nothing about.

Female professions, as distinct from what may be termed female handicrafts, which merit separate classification and discussion, may, I think, be thus divided: the instruction of youth; painting or art; literature; and the vocation of public entertainment — including actresses, singers, musicians, and the like.

The first of these, being a calling universally wanted, and the easiest in which to win, at all events, daily bread, is the great chasm into which the helpless and penniless of our sex generally plunge; and this indiscriminate Quintus Curtiusism, so far from filling up the gulf, widens it every hour. It must be so, while young women of all classes and all degrees of capability rush into governessing, as many young men enter the church, — because they think it a "respectable" profession to get on in, and are fit for nothing else. Thus the most important of ours, and the highest of all men's vocations, are both degraded —

as they can be degraded — by the unworthiness and incompetency of their professors.

If, in the most solemn sense, not one woman in five thousand is fit to be a mother, we may safely say that not two out of that number are fit to be governesses. Consider all that the office implies: very many of a mother's duties, with the addition of considerable mental attainments, firmness of character, good sense, good temper, good breeding; patience, gentleness, loving-kindness. In short, every quality that goes to make a perfect woman, is required of her who presumes to undertake the education of one single little child.

Does any one pause to reflect what a "little child" is? Not sentimentally, as a creature to be philosophised upon, painted and poetised; nor selfishly, as a kissable, scoldable, sugar-plum-feedable plaything; but as a human soul and body, to be moulded, instructed, and influenced, in order that it in its turn may mould, instruct, and influence unborn generations. And yet, in face of this awful responsibility, wherein each deed and word of hers may bear fruit, good or ill, to indefinite ages, does nearly every educated gentlewoman *thrown upon* her own resources, nearly every half-

educated "young person" who wishes by that means to step out of her own sphere into the one above it, enter upon the vocation of a governess.

Whether it really is her vocation, she never stops to think; and yet, perhaps, in no calling is a personal bias more indispensable. For knowledge, and the power of imparting it intelligibly, are two distinct and often opposite qualities; the best student by no means necessarily makes the best teacher; nay, when both faculties are combined, they are sometimes neutralised by some fault of disposition, such as want of temper or of will. And allowing all these, granting every possible intellectual and practical competency, there remains still doubtful the moral influence, which, according to the source from which it springs, may ennoble or corrupt a child for life.

All these are facts so trite and so patent, that one would almost feel it superfluous to state them, did we not see how utterly they are ignored day by day by even sensible people; how parents go on lavishing expense on their house, dress, and entertainments — everything but the education of their children; sending their boys to cheap boarding-schools, and engaging for their daughters governesses at 20*l.* a year, or daily tuition.

at sixpence an hour; and how, as a natural result, thousands of incapable girls, and ill-informed, unscrupulous women, go on professing to teach everything under the sun, adding lie upon lie, and meanness upon meanness — often through no voluntary wickedness, but sheer helplessness, because they must either do that or starve!

Yet, all the while we expect our rising generation to turn out perfection; instead of which we find it — what?

I do solemnly aver, having seen more than one generation of young girls grow up into womanhood — that the fairest and best specimens of our sex that I have ever known have been among those who have never gone to school, or scarcely ever had a regular governess.

Surely such a fact as this — I put it to general experience, whether it is not a fact? — indicates some great flaw in the carrying out of this large branch of women's work. How is it to be remedied? I believe, like all reformations, it must begin at the root — with the governesses themselves.

Unless a woman has a decided pleasure and facility *in teaching*, an honest knowledge of everything she

professes to impart, a liking for children, and above all, a strong moral sense of her responsibility towards them, for her to attempt to enrol herself in the scholastic order is absolute profanation. Better turn shopwoman, needlewoman, lady's-maid — even become a decent housemaid, and learn how to sweep a floor, than belie her own soul, and peril many other souls, by entering upon what is, or ought to be, a female "ministry," unconsecrated for, and incapable of the work.

"But," say they, "work we must have. Competition is so great, that if we did not profess to do everything, it would be supposed we could do nothing: and so we should starve."

Yet, what is competition? A number of people attempting to do what most of them can only half do, and some cannot do at all — thereby "cutting one another's throats," as the saying is, so long as their incapacity is concealed; when it is found out, starving. There may be exceptions from exceeding misfortune and the like — but in the long run, I believe it will be found that few women, really competent to what they undertake, be it small or great, starve for want.

of work to do. So, in this case, no influence is so deeply felt in a house, or so anxiously retained, if only from self-interest, as the influence of a good governess over the children; among the innumerable throng of teachers, there is nothing more difficult to find — or more valuable when found, to judge by the high terms asked and obtained by many professors — than a lady who can teach only a single thing, solidly, conscientiously, and well.

In this, as in most social questions, where to theorise is easy and to practise very difficult, it will often be found that the silent undermining of an evil is safer than the loud outcry against it. If every governess, so far as her power extends, would strive to elevate the character of her profession by elevating its members, many of the unquestionable wrongs and miseries of governess-ship would gradually right themselves. A higher standard of capability would weed out much cumbersome mediocrity; and, competition lessened, the value of labour would rise. I say "the value of labour," because, when we women do work, we must learn to rate ourselves at no ideal and picturesque value, but simply as *labourers* — fair and *honest competitors* in the field of the world; and our

wares as mere merchandise, where money's worth alone brings money, or has any right to expect it.

This applies equally to the two next professions, art and literature. I put art first, as being the most difficult — perhaps, in its highest form, almost impossible to women. There are many reasons for this; in the course of education necessary for a painter, in the not unnatural repugnance that is felt to women's drawing from "the life," attending anatomical dissections, and so on — all which studies are indispensable to one who would plumb the depths and scale the heights of the most arduous of the liberal arts. Whether any woman will ever do this, remains yet to be proved. Meantime, many lower and yet honourable positions are open to female handlers of the brush.

But (in literature we own no such boundaries; there we meet men on level ground — and, shall I say it? — we do often beat them in their own field.) We are acute and accurate historians, clear explanators of science, especially successful in imaginative works, and but lately *Aurora Leigh* has proved that we can write as great a poem as any man among them all. Any publisher's list, any handful of weekly or monthly periodicals, can testify to our power of entering

boldly on the literary profession, and pursuing it wholly, self-devotedly, and self-reliantly, thwarted by no hardships, and content with no height short of the highest.

So much for the best of us — women whose work will float down the ages, safe and sure; there is no need to speak of it or them. But there is another secondary class among us, neither "geniuses" nor ordinary women — aspiring to both destinies, and usually achieving neither: of these it is necessary to say a word.

In any profession, there is nothing, short of being absolutely evil, which is so injurious, so fatal, as mediocrity. To the amateur who writes "sweetly" or paints "prettily," her work is mere recreation; and though it may be less improving for the mind to do small things on your own account, than to be satisfied with appreciating the greater doings of other people, still, it is harmless enough, if it stops there. But all who leave domestic criticism to plunge into the open arena of art — I use the word in its widest sense — must abide by art's severest canons. One of these is, that every person who paints a common-place picture, *or writes* a mediocre book, contributes temporarily —

happily, only temporarily — to lower the standard of public taste, fills unworthily some better competitor's place, and without achieving any private good, does a positive wrong to the community at large.

One is often tempted to believe, in the great influx of small talents which now deluges us, that if half the books written, and pictures painted, were made into one great bonfire, it would be their shortest, easiest, and safest way of illuminating the world.

Therefore, let men do as they will — and truly they are often ten times vainer and more ambitious than we! — but I would advise every woman to examine herself and judge herself, morally and intellectually, by the sharpest tests of criticism, before she attempts art or literature, either for abstract fame or as a means of livelihood. Let her take to heart, humbly, the telling truth, that

"Fools rush in where angels fear to tread,"

and be satisfied that the smallest perfect achievement is nobler than the grandest failure. But having, after mature deliberation, chosen her calling, and conscientiously believing it is her calling — that in which she shall do most good, and best carry out the aim of her

existence — let her fulfil to the last iota its solemn requirements.

These entail more, much more, than flighty young genius or easily-satisfied mediocrity ever dreams of; labour incessant, courage inexhaustible, sustained under difficulties, misfortunes, and rebuffs of every conceivable kind — added thereto, not unfrequently, the temperament to which these things come hardest. *Le génie c'est la patience;* and though there is a truth beyond it — since all the patience in the world will not serve as a substitute for genius, — still, never was a truer saying than this of old Buffon's. Especially as applied to women, when engaged in a profession which demands from them, no less than from men, the fervent application, and sometimes the total devotion of a lifetime.

For, high as the calling is, it is not always, in the human sense, a happy one; it often results in, if it does not spring from, great sacrifices; and is full of a thousand misconstructions, annoyances, and temptations. Nay, since ambition is a quality far oftener deficient in us than in the other sex, its very successes are less sweet to women than to men. Many a "celebrated

authoress" or "exquisite paintress" must have felt the heart-truth in *Aurora Leigh:*

> "I might have been a common woman, now,
> And happier, less known and less left alone,
> Perhaps a better woman after all —
> With chubby children hanging round my neck,
> To keep me low and wise. Ah me! the vines
> That bear such fruit are proud to stoop with it —
> The palm stands upright in a realm of sand."

And, setting aside both these opposite poles of the female character and lot, it remains yet doubtful whether the maiden-aunt who goes from house to house, perpetually busy and useful — the maiden house-mother, who keeps together an orphan family, having all the cares, and only half the joys of maternity or mistress-ship — even the active, bustling "old maid," determined on setting everybody to rights, and having a finger in every pie that needs her, and a few that don't — I question whether each of these women has not a more natural, and therefore, probably, a happier existence, than any "woman of genius" that ever enlightened the world.

But happiness it not the first nor the only thing on earth. Whosoever has entered upon this vocation in the right spirit, let her keep to it, neither afraid nor ashamed. The days of blue-stockings are over: it is a

notable fact, that the best housekeepers, the neatest needle-women, the most discreet managers of their own and others' affairs, are ladies whose names the world cons over in library lists and exhibition catalogues. I could give them now — except that the world has no possible business with them, except to read their books and look at their pictures. It must imply something deficient in the women themselves, if the rude curiosity of this said well-meaning but often impertinent public is ever allowed to break in upon that dearest right of every woman — the inviolable sanctity of her home.

Without — in these books and by these pictures — let it always be a fair fight, and no quarter. To exact consideration merely on account of her sex, is in any woman the poorest cowardice. She has entered the neutral realm of pure intellect — has donned brain-armour, and must carry on with lawful, consecrated weapons a combat, of which the least reward in her eyes, in which she never can freeze up or burn out either the woman-tears or woman-smiles, will be that public acknowledgment called Fame.

This fame, as gained in art or literature, is cer-

tainly of a purer and safer kind than that which falls to the lot of the female *artiste*.

Most people will grant that no great gift is given to be hid under a bushel; that a Sarah Siddons, a Rachel, or a Jenny Lind, being created, was certainly not created for nothing. There seems no reason why a great actress or vocalist should not exercise her talents to the utmost for the world's benefit, and her own; nor that any genius, boiling and bursting up to find expression, should be pent down, cruelly and dangerously, because it refuses to run in the ordinary channel of feminine development. But the last profession of the four which I have enumerated as the only paths at present open to women, is the one which is the most full of perils and difficulties, on account of the personality involved in its exercise.

We may paint scores of pictures, write shelvesful of books — the errant children of our brain may be familiar half over the known world, and yet we ourselves sit as quiet by our chimney-corner, live a life as simple and peaceful as any happy "common woman" of them all. But with the *artiste* it is very different; she needs to be constantly before the public, not only mentally, but physically: the general eye becomes

familiar, not merely with her genius, but her corporeality; and every comment of admiration or blame awarded to her, is necessarily an immediate personal criticism. This of itself is a position contrary to the instinctive something — call it reticence, modesty, shyness, what you will — which is inherent in every one of Eve's daughters. Any young girl, standing before a large party in her first *tableau vivant* — any singing-pupil at a public examination — any boy-lover of some adorable actress, at the moment when he first thinks of that goddess as *his wife*, will understand what I mean.

But that is by no means the chief objection; for the feeling of personal shyness dies out, and in the true *artiste* becomes altogether merged in the love and inspiration of her art — the inexplicable fascination of which turns the many-eyed gazing mass into a mere "public," of whose individuality the performer is no more conscious than was the Pythoness of her curled and scented Greek audience, when she felt on her tripod the afflatus of the unconquerable, inevitable god. The saddest phase of artiste-life — which is, doubtless, the natural result of this constant appearance *before* the public eye, this incessant struggle for the

public's personal verdict — is its intense involuntary egotism.

No one can have seen anything of theatrical or musical circles without noticing this — the incessant recurrence to "*my* part," "*my* song," "what the public think of *me*." In the hand-to-hand struggle for the capricious public's favour, this sad selfishness is apparently inevitable. "Each for himself" seems implanted in masculine nature, for its own preservation; but when it comes to "each for *herself*" — when you see the fairest Shakspeare heroines turn red or pale at the mention of a rival impersonator — when Miss This cannot be asked to a party for fear of meeting Madame That, or if they do meet, through all their smiling civility you perceive their backs are up, like two strange cats meeting at a parlour-door — I say, this is the most lamentable of all results, not absolutely vicious, which the world, and the necessity of working in it, effect on women.

And for this reason the profession of public entertainment, in all its gradation, from the inspired *tragédienne* to the poor chorus-singer, is, above any profession I know, to be marked with a spiritual Humane Society's pole, "*Dangerous*." Not after the vulgar

notion: we have among us too many chaste, matronly actresses, and charming maiden-vocalists, to enter now into the old question about the "respectability" of the stage; but on account of the great danger to temperament, character, and mode of thought, to which such a life peculiarly exposes its followers.

But, if a woman has chosen it — I repeat in this as in any other — let her not forego it; for in every occupation the worthiness, like the "readiness," "is all." Never let her be moulded by her calling, but mould her calling to herself; being, as every woman ought to be, the woman first, the *artiste* afterwards. And, doubtless, so are many; doubtless one could find, not only among the higher ranks of this profession, where genius itself acts as a purifying and refining fire, but in its lower degrees, many who, under the glare of the footlights and the din of popular applause, have kept their freshness and singleness of character unfaded to the end. Ay, even among poor ballet-dancers, capering with set rouged smiles and leaden hearts — coarse screaming concert-singers, doing sham pathos at a guinea a-night — flaunting actresses-of-all-work, firmly believing themselves the best *Juliet* or *Lady Macbeth extant, and* yet condescending to take ever so small a

part — even the big-headed "*princess*" of an Easter extravaganza, for the sake of the old parents, or the fiddler-husband and the sickly babies at home. No doubt, many of them live — let us rather say, endure — a life as pure, as patient, as self-denying, as that of hundreds of timid, daintily protected girls, and would-be correct matrons, who shrink in safe privacy from the very thought of these. But Heaven counts and cares for all.

Therefore, in this perilous road, double honour be unto those who walk upright, double pity unto those who fall!

Conning over again this desultory chapter, it seems to me it all comes to neither more nor less than this: that since a woman, by choosing a definite profession, must necessarily quit the kindly shelter and safe negativeness of a private life, and assume a substantive position, it is her duty not hastily to decide, and before deciding, in every way to count the cost. But having chosen, let her fulfil her lot. Let there be no hesitations, no regrets, no compromises — they are at once cowardly and vain. She may have missed or foregone much; — I repeat, our natural and happiest life is

when we lose ourselves in the exquisite absorption of home, the delicious retirement of dependent love; but what she has, she has, and nothing can ever take it from her. Nor is it, after all, a small thing for any woman — be she governess, painter, author, or *artiste* — to feel that, higher or lower, according to her degree, she ranks among that crowned band who, whether or not they are the happy ones, are elected to the heaven-given honour of being the Workers of the world.

CHAPTER IV.

Female Handicrafts.

WHILE planning this chapter I chanced to read, in a late number of the *North British Quarterly*, a paper headed "Employment of Women," which expressed many of my ideas in forms so much clearer and better than any into which I can cast them, that I long hesitated whether it were worth while attempting to set them down here at all; but afterwards, seeing that these Thoughts aim less at originality than usefulness — nay, that since they are but the repetition in one woman's written words of what must already have occurred to the minds of hundreds of other women, — if they were startlingly original, they would probably cease to be useful, — I determined to say my say. It matters little when, or how, or by how many, truth is spoken, if only it be truth.

Taking up the question of female handicrafts, in contradistinction to female professions, the first thing that strikes one is the largeness of the subject, and

how very little one practically knows about it. Of necessity, it has not much to say for itself; it lives by its fingers rather than its brains; it cannot put its life into print. Sometimes a poet does this for it, and thrills millions with a *Song of the Shirt;* or a novelist presents us with some imaginary portrait — some *Lettice Arnold*, *Susan Hopley*, or *Ruth*, idealised more or less, it may be, yet sufficiently true to nature to give us a passing interest in our shop-girls, sempstresses, and maid-servants, abstractedly, as a class. But of the individuals, of their modes of existence, feeling, and thought — of their sorrows and pleasures, accomplishments and defects — we "ladies" of the middle and upper ranks, especially those who reside in great towns, know essentially nothing.

The whole working class is a silent class; and this division of it being a degree above the cottage visitations of ladies Bountiful, or the legislation of Ten-Hours'-Bill Committees in an enlightened British Parliament, is the most silent of all. Yet it includes so many grades — from the West-end milliner, who dresses in silk every day, and is almost (often quite) a "lady," down to the wretched lodging-house "slavey," who *seems to be less* a woman than a mere working animal

— that, viewing it, one shrinks back in awe of its vastness. What an enormous influence it must unconsciously exercise on society, this dumb multitude, which, behind counters, in work-rooms, garrets, and bazaars, or in service at fashionable, respectable, or barely decent houses, goes toiling, toiling on, from morning till night — often from night till morning — at anything and everything, just for daily bread and honesty!

Now, Society recognises this fact — gets up early-closing movements, makes eloquent speeches in lawn sleeves or peers' broadcloth at Hanover Square Rooms, or writes a letter to the *Times*, enlarging on the virtue of ordering court-dresses in time, so that one portion of Queen Victoria's female subjects may not be hurried into disease or death, or worse, in order that another portion may shine out brilliant and beautiful at Her Majestys ball's and drawing-rooms. All this is good; but it is only a drop in the bucket — a little oil cast on the top of the stream. The great tide of struggle and suffering flows on just the same; the surface may be slightly troubled, but the undercurrent seems to be in a state which it is impossible to change.

Did I say "impossible?" No; I do not believe

there is anything under heaven to which we have a right to apply that word.

Apparently, one of the chief elements of wrong in the class which I have distinguished as handicrafts-women, is the great and invidious distinction drawn between it and that of professional women. Many may repudiate this in theory; yet, practically, I ask lady-mothers whether they would not rather take for daughter-in-law the poorest governess, the most penniless dependant, than a "person in business" — milliner, dressmaker, shop-woman, &c.? As for a domestic servant — a cook, or even a lady's-maid — I am afraid a young man's choice of such an one for his wife would ruin him for ever in the eyes of Society.

Society — begging her pardon! — is often a great fool. Why should it be less creditable to make good dresses than bad books? In what is it better to be at night a singing servant to an applauding or capriciously contemptuous public, than to wait on the said public in the day-time from behind the counter of shop or bazaar? I confess, I cannot see the mighty difference; when the question, as must be distinctly understood, concerns not personal merit or endowments, but external calling

And here comes in the old warfare, which began

worthily enough, in the respect due to mind over matter, head-work over hand-work, but has deteriorated by custom into a ridiculous and contemptible tyranny — the battle between professions and trades. I shall not enter into it here. Happily, men are now slowly waking up — women more slowly still — to a perception of the truth, that honour is an intrinsic and not extrinsic possession; that one means of livelihood is not of itself one whit more "respectable" than another; that credit or discredit can attach in no degree to the work done, but to the manner of doing it, and to the individual who does it.

But, on the other hand, any class that, as a class, lacks honour, has usually, some time or other, fallen short in desert of it. Thus, among handicraftswomen, who bear to professional women the same relation as tradesmen to gentlemen, one often finds great self-assertion and equivalent want of self-respect, painful servility or pitiable impertinence — in short, many of those faults which arise in a transition state of partial education, and accidental semi-refinement. Also, since a certain amount of both refinement and education is necessary to create a standard of moral conscientiousness, this order of women is much more deficient than

the one above it in that stern, steady uprightness which constitutes what we call elevation of character. Through the want of pride in their calling, and laxity or slovenliness of principle in pursuing it, they are at war with the class above them; which justly complains of those unconquerable faults and deficiencies that make patience the only virtue it can practise towards its inferiors.

How amend this lamentable state of things? How lessen the infinite wrongs, errors, and sufferings of this mass of womanhood, out of which are glutted our churchyards, hospitals, prisons, penitentiaries; from which, more than from any other section of society, is taken that pest and anguish of our streets, the

> "Eighty thousand women in one smile,
> Who only smile at night beneath the gas."

Many writers of both sexes are now striving to answer this question; and many others, working more by their lives than their pens, are practically trying to solve the problem. All honour and success attend both workers and writers! Each in their vocation will spur on society to bestir itself, and, by the combination of popular feeling, to achieve in some large form a solid social good.

But in these Thoughts I would fain address individuals. *I want to* speak, not to society at large, for

as we well know, "everybody's business" is often "nobody's business," but to each woman separately, appealing to her in her personal character as employer or employed.

And, first, as employer.

I am afraid it is from some natural deficiency in the constitution of our sex that it is so difficult to teach us justice. It certainly was a mistake to make that admirable virtue a female; and even then the allegorist seems to have found it necessary to bandage her eyes. No; kindliness, unselfishness, charity, come to us by nature: but I wish I could see more of my sisters learning and practising what is far more difficult and far less attractive — common justice, especially towards one another.

In dealing with men, there is little fear but that they will take care of themselves. That "first law of nature," self-preservation, is — doubtless, for wise purposes — imprinted pretty strongly on the mind of the male sex. It is in transactions between women and women that the difficulty lies. Therein — I put the question to the aggregate conscience of us all — is it not, openly or secretly, our chief aim to get the largest possible amount of labour for the smallest possible price?

We do not mean any harm; we are only acting for the best — for our own benefit, and that of those nearest to us; and yet we are committing an act of injustice, the result of which fills slopsellers' doors with starving sempstresses, and causes unlimited competition among incompetent milliners and dressmakers, while skilled labour in all these branches is lamentably scarce and extravagantly dear. Of course! so long as one continually hears ladies say: "Oh, I got such and such a thing almost for half-price — such a bargain!" or: "Do you know I have found out such a cheap dressmaker!" May I suggest to these the common-sense law of political economy, that neither labour nor material can possibly be got "cheaply" — that is, below its average acknowledged cost, without *somebody's* being cheated? Consequently, these devotees to cheapness, when not victims — which they frequently are in the long run — are very little better than genteel swindlers.

There is another lesser consideration, and yet not small either. Labour, unfairly remunerated, of necessity deteriorates in quality, and thereby lowers the standard of appreciation. Every time I pay a low price for an ill-fitting gown or an ugly tawdry bonnet — cheapness *is usually tawdry* — I am wronging not merely myself,

but my *employée*, by encouraging careless work and bad taste, and by thus going in direct opposition to a rule from whence springs so much that is eclectic and beautiful in the female character, that "whatever is worth doing at all is worth doing well." If, on the contrary, I knowingly pay below its value for really good work, I am, as aforesaid, neither more nor less than a dishonest appropriator of other people's property — a swindler — a *thief*.

Humiliating as the confession may be, it must be owned that, on the whole, men are less prone to this petty vice than we are. You rarely find a gentleman beating down his tailor, cheapening his hosier, or haggling with his groom over a few shillings of wages Either his wider experience has enlarged his mind, or he has less time for bargaining, or he will not take the trouble. It is among *us*, alas! that you see most instances of "stinginess" — not the noble economy which can and does lessen its personal wants to the narrowest rational limit, but the mean parsimony which tries to satisfy them below cost-price, and consequently always at somebody else's expense rather than its own. Against this crying sin — none the less a sin because often masked as a virtue, and even corrupted from an original

virtue — it becomes our bounden duty, as women, to protest with all our power. More especially, because it is a temptation peculiar to ourselves; engendered by many a cruel domestic narrowness, many a grinding struggle to "make ends meet," of which the sharpness always falls to the woman's lot, to a degree that men, in their grand picturesque pride and reckless indifference to expense, can rarely either feel or appreciate.

I do not here advance the argument, usually enforced by experience, that cheapness always comes dearest in the end, and that only a wealthy person can afford to make "bargains;" because I wish to open the question — and leave it — on the far higher ground of moral justice. The celebrated sentiment of Benjamin Franklin, "Honesty is the best policy," appears rather a mean and unchristian mode of inculcating the said virtue.

Another injustice, less patent, but equally harmful, is constantly committed by ladies — namely, the conducting of business relations in an unbusiness-like manner. Carelessness, irregularity, or delay in giving orders; needless absorption of time, which is money; and, above all, want of explicitness and decision, are *faults which no* one dare complain of in a customer,

but yet which result in the most cruel wrong. Perhaps the first quality in an employer is to know her own mind; the second, to be able to state it clearly, so as to avoid the possibility of mistake; and no error caused by a blunder or irresolution on her part should ever be visited upon the person employed.

There is one injustice which I hardly need refer to, so nearly does it approach to actual dishonesty. Any lady who wilfully postpones payment beyond a reasonable time, or in any careless way prefers her convenience to her duty, her pleasure to her sense of right — who for one single day keeps one single person waiting for a debt which at all lies within her power to discharge — is a creature so far below the level of true womanhood that I would rather not speak of her.

And now, as to the class of the employed. It resolves itself into so many branches that I shall attempt only to generalise, nor refer to distinctive occupations, which are dividing, subdividing, and extending from year to year. The world is slowly discovering that women are capable of far more crafts than was supposed, if only they are properly educated for them: that, here and abroad, they are good accountants, shop-

keepers, drapers' assistants, telegraph clerks, watch-makers: and doubtless would be better, if the ordinary training which almost every young man has a chance of getting, and which in any case he is supposed to have, were thought equally indispensable to young women. And well, indeed, if it were so: for there is no possible condition of life where business habits are not of the greatest value to any woman.

I have heard the outcry raised, that this educating of one sex to do the work and press into the place of the other lessens the value of labour, and so depreciates the chances of matrimony, to the manifest injury of both. Charming theory! which pays us the double-edged compliment of being so evidently afraid of our competitive powers, and so complacently satisfied, that the sole purpose and use of our existence is to be married!

But Nature, wiser than such theorists, contradicts them without any argument of ours. She has sufficiently limited our physique to prevent our being very fatal rivals in manual labour; she has given us instincts that will rarely make us prefer masculine occupations to sweeping the hearth and rocking the *cradle* — when such duties are possible. And if it

were not so, would the case be any better? There is a certain amount of work to be done, and somebody must do it: a certain community to be fed, and it must be fed somehow. Would it benefit the male portion thereof to have all the burthen on their own shoulders? Would it raise the value of their labour to depreciate ours? or advantage them to keep us, forcibly, in idleness, ignorance, and incapacity? I trow not. Rather let each sex have a fair chance: let women, and single women above all, be taught to do all they can, and do it as well as they can. Little fear that there will not remain a sufficiently wide field open to competent men, and only men, in every handicraft: little fear that the natural *métier* of most women will not always be the cherished labours of the fireside.

One trade in all its branches, domestic or otherwise, is likely to remain principally our own — the use of the needle.

Who amongst us has not a great reverence for that little dainty tool; such a wonderful brightener and consoler; our weapon of defence against slothfulness, weariness, and sad thoughts; our thrifty helper in poverty, our pleasant friend at all times? From the first "cobbled-up" doll's frock — the first neat stitching

for mother, or hemming of father's pocket-handkerchief — the first bit of sewing shyly done for some one who is to own the hand and all its duties — most of all, the first strange, delicious fairy work, sewed at diligently, in solemn faith and tender love, for the tiny creature as yet unknown and unseen — truly, no one but ourselves can tell what the needle is to us women.

With all due respect for brains, I think women cannot be too early taught to respect likewise their own ten fingers.

It is a grand thing to be a good needlewoman, even in what is called in England "plain sewing," and in Scotland, a "white seam;" and any one who ever tried to make a dress knows well enough that skill, patience, and ingenuity, nay, a certain kind of genius, is necessary to achieve any good result. Of all artificers, the poor dressmaker is the last who ought to be grudged good payment. Instead of depreciating, we should rather try to inspire her with a sincere following of her art as an art — even a pleasant pride in it.

"The labour we delight in physics pain;"

and it may be doubted whether any branch of labour *can be worthily* pursued unless the labourer take an

interest in it beyond the mere hire. I know a dress-maker who evidently feels personally aggrieved when you decline to yield to her taste in costume; who never spares pains or patience to adorn her customers to the very best of her skill; and who, by her serious and simple belief in her own business, would half persuade you that the destinies of the whole civilised world hung on the noble but neglected art of mantua-making. One cannot but respect that woman!

Much has been said concerning justice from the employer to the employed, and as much might be said in behalf on the opposite side. For a person to undertake more work than she can finish, to break her promises, tell white lies, be wasteful, unpunctual, is to be scarcely less dishonest to her employer than if she directly robbed her. The want of conscientiousness, which is only too general among the lower order of shopkeepers and people in business, does more to brand upon trade the old stigma which the present generation is wisely endeavouring to efface, and to blacken and broaden the line, now fast vanishing, between tradesfolk and gentlefolk — more, tenfold, than all the narrow-minded pride of the most prejudiced aristocracy.

I should like to see working women — handi-crafts-women — take up *their* pride, and wield it with sense and courage; I should like to see them educating themselves, for education is the grand motive power in the advancement of all classes. I do not allude to mere book-learning, but that combination of mental, moral, and manual attainments, the mere desire for and appreciation of which give a higher tone to the whole being. And there are few conditions of life, whether it be passed at the counter or over the needle, in the work-room or at home, where an intelligent young woman has not some opportunity of gaining information; little enough it may be — from a book snatched up at rare intervals, a print-shop window glanced at, as she passes along the street — a silent observation and imitation of whatever seems most pleasant and refined in those of her superiors with whom she may be thrown into contact. However small her progress may be, yet if she have a genuine wish for mental improvement, the true thirst after what is good and beautiful — the good being always the beautiful — for its own sake, there is little fear but that she will gradually attain her end.

There is one class which, from its daily and hourly *familiarity* with that above it, has perhaps more oppor-

tunities than any for this gradual self-cultivation — I mean the class of domestic servants; but these, though belonging to the ranks of women who live by hand-labour, form a body in so many points distinct, that they must form the subject of a separate chapter.

Cannot some one suggest a slight amendment on the usual cry of elevating the working classes — whether it be not possible to arouse in them the desire to elevate themselves? Every growth of nature begins less in the external force applied than the vital principle asserting itself within. It is the undercurrent that helps to break up the ice; the sap, as well as the sunshine, that brings out the green leaves of spring. I doubt if any class can be successfully elevated unless it has indicated the power to raise itself; and the first thing to make it worthy of respect is, to teach it to respect itself.

"In all labour there is profit" — ay, and honour too, if the toilers could but recognise it; if the large talk now current about "the dignity of labour" could only be reduced to practice; if, to begin at the beginning, we could but each persuade the handful of young persons immediately around us and under our influence, that to make an elegant dress or pretty bonnet — nay,

even to cook a good dinner, or take pride in a neatly kept house, is a right creditable, womanly thing in itself, quite distinct from the profit accruing from it. Also, since hope is the mainspring of excellence, as well as happiness, in any calling, let it be impressed on every one that her future advancement lies, spiritually as well as literally, in her own hands.

Seldom, with the commonest chance to start with, will a real good worker fail to find employment; seldomer still, with diligence, industry, civility, and punctuality, will a person of even moderate skill lack customers. Worth of any kind is rare enough in the world for most people to be thankful to get it — and keep it, too. In these days, the chief difficulty seems to consist, not in the acknowledgment of merit, but the finding of any merit that is worth acknowledging — above all, any merit that has the sense and consistency to acknowledge and have faith in itself, and to trust in its own power of upholding itself afloat in the very stormiest billows of the tempestuous world; assured with worthy old Milton, that

> "If virtue feeble were
> Heaven itself would stoop to her."

But I am pulled down from this Utopia of female

handicrafts by the distant half-smothered laughter of my two maid-servants, going cheerily to their bed through the silent house; and by the recollection that I myself must be up early, as my new sempstress is coming to-morrow. Well, she shall be kindly treated, have plenty of food and drink, light and fire; and though I shall be stern and remorseless as fate respecting the quality of her work, I shall give her plenty of time to do it in. No more will be expected from her than her capabilities seem to allow and her word promised; still, there will be no bating an inch of that: it would be unfair both to herself and me. In fact, the very reason I took her was from her honest look and downright sayings: — "Ma'am, if you can't wait, or know anybody better, don't employ me; but, ma'am, when I say I'll come, I always do." — (*P. S.* She didn't!!)

Honest woman! If she turns out fairly, so much the better for us both, in the future, as to gowns and crown-pieces. If she does not, I shall at least enjoy the satisfaction of having done unto her as, in her place, I would like others to do unto me — which simple axiom expresses and includes all I have been writing on this subject.

CHAPTER V.

Female Servants.

THOUGH female servants come under the category of handicraftswomen, yet they form a distinct class, very important in itself, and essential to the welfare of the community.

A faithful servant — next best blessing, and next rarest, after a faithful friend! — who among us has not had, or wanted, such an one? Some inestimable follower of the family, who has known all the family changes, sorrows, and joys; is always at hand to look after the petty necessities and indescribably small nothings which, in the aggregate, make up the sum of one's daily comfort; whom one can trust in sight and out of sight — call upon for help in season and out of season; rely on in absence, or sickness, or trouble, to "keep the house going," and upon whom one can at all times, and under all circumstances, depend for that conscientious fidelity of service which money can never *purchase, nor repay.*

And this, what domestic servants ought to be, might be, they are — alas, how seldom!

Looking round on the various households we know, I fear we shall find that this relation of master (or mistress) and servant — a relation so necessary, as to have been instituted from the foundation of the world, and since so hallowed by both biblical and secular chronicles, as to be, next to ties of blood and friendship, the most sacred bond that can exist between man and man — is, on the whole, as badly fulfilled as any under the sun.

Whose fault is this? — the superior's, who, in the march of intellect and education around him, losing somewhat the distinction of mere rank, yet tries to enforce it by instituting external distinctions impossible to be maintained between himself and his dependants? — or the inferior's, who, sufficiently advanced to detect the weaknesses of the class above him, though not to cure his own, abjures the blind reverence and obedience of ancient times, without attaining to the higher spirit of this our day — when the law of servitude has been remodelled, elevated, and consecrated by Christianity itself, in the person of its Divine Founder? "*He that is greatest among you, let him be* your servant."

This recognition of the sanctity of service, through the total and sublime equality on which, in one sense, are thus placed the server and the served, seems the point whereon all minor points ought to turn, and which, in the solemn responsibility it imposes on both parties, ought never to be absent from the mind of either; yet it is usually one of the very last things likely to enter there.

To tell Mrs. Jones — who yesterday engaged her cook Betty for fourteen pounds a-year, having beaten her down from fourteen guineas by a compromise about the beer; and who, after various squabbles, finally turned out pretty Susan, the housemaid, into the ghastly Vanityfair of London, for gossiping on area steps with divers "followers" — or the honourable Mrs. Browne Browne, who keeps Victorine sitting up till daylight just to undo her mistress's gown, and last week threatened, though she did not dare, to dismiss the fine upper-nurse, because, during the brief minute or two after dessert, when Master Baby appeared, mamma, who rarely sees him at any other time, and never meddles with his education, physical or moral, was shocked to hear from his rosy lips a "naughty *word*" — *to say* to these "ladies" that the "women"

they employ are of the same feminine flesh and blood, would of course meet nominal assent. But to attempt to get them to carry that truth out practically — to own that they and their servants are of like passions and feelings, capable of similar elevation or deterioration of character, and amenable to the same moral laws — in fact, all "sisters" together, accountable both to themselves and to the other sex for the influence they mutually exercise over one another, would, I fear, be held simply ridiculous. "Sisters" indeed! Certainly not, under any circumstances — except when Death, the great Leveller, having permanently interposed, we may safely, over a few spadefuls of earth, venture to acknowledge "our dear sister here departed."

I have gone up and down the world a good deal, yet I have scarcely found one household, rich or poor, hard or benevolent, Christian or worldly, aristocratic or democratic, which, however correct in outward practice, could be brought to own as a guiding principle this, which is apparently the New-Testament principle with regard to service and servants.

This by no means implies or commands equality; of all shams, there is none so vain as the assertion of

that which does not, and cannot exist in this world, and which the highest religious and social legislation never supposes possible.

For instance, my cook prepares and sends up dinner. From long practice, she does it a hundred times better than I could do; nay, even takes a pleasure and pride in it, for which I am truly thankful, and sincerely indebted to her, too: for a good cook is a household blessing, and no small contributor to health, temper, and enjoyment. Accordingly, I treat her with consideration, and even enter her domains with a certain respectful awe. But I do not invite her to eat her own dinner, or mingle in the society which to me is its most piquant sauce. She was not born to it, nor brought up for it. Good old soul! she would gape at the finest bon-mot, and doze over the most intellectual conversation. She is better left in peace by her kitchen-fire.

Also, though it is a real pleasure to me to watch my neat parlour-maid in and out of the drawing-room, to see by her bright intelligent face that she understands much of whatever talk is going on, and may learn something by it too sometimes; still, I should *never think* of asking her to take a seat among the

guests. Poor little lass! she would be as unhappy and out of place here as I should be in the noisy Christmas party below-stairs, of which she is the very centre of attraction, getting more compliments and mistletoe-kisses than I ever got, or wished for, in my whole life-time. And, by the same rule, though I like to see her prettily dressed, and never scruple to tell her when she sets my teeth on edge by a blue bow on a green-cotton gown, I do not deem it necessary, when she helps me on with my silk one, to condole with her over the said cotton, or to offer her the use of my toilet and my chaperonage at the conversazione to which I am going, where, in the scores I meet, there may be scarcely any face more pleasant, more kindly, or more necessary to me than her own.

Nevertheless, each is in her station. Providence fixed both where they are; and while they there remain, unless either individual is qualified to change, neither has the smallest right to overstep the barrier between them; recognised, perhaps, better tacitly than openly by either, but never by any ridiculous assumption of equality denied or set aside. Yet one meeting-point there is — far below, or above, all external barriers — the common womanhood in which all share.

If anything were to happen to my little maid — if I caught her crying over "father's" letter, or running in, laughing and rosy, after shutting the back gate on — somebody, I am afraid my heart would warm to her just as much as, though I never left my card at Buckingham Palace, it is prone to do to a certain Lady there, who takes early walks, and goes rides with her little children — apparently a better woman, wife, and mother than nine-tenths of her subjects. Is it not here, then, that true equality lies — in this recognition of a common nature; to the divinely-appointed law of which all external practice is to be referred? Would that both mistresses and servants could be brought to recognise this equality — not as a mere sentimental theory, but as a practical fact, the foundation and starting-point of all relations between them!

It concerns maids just as much as mistresses; and to them I wish to speak, in the earnest hope that every household which reads this book will do what is a practice, useful and excellent in itself, with all family books, — send it down of quiet evenings, Sundays and holidays, to be read in the kitchen, when work is done. For, work being done, no mental *improvement* that is compatible with the duties

of his or her calling ought to be forbidden any human being.

I should like, first, to impress upon all women-servants how very much society depends upon them for its well-being, physical and moral. And this, with no fear of thereby increasing their self-conceit: it is not responsibility, but the want or loss of it, which degrades character. To feel that you can or might be something, is often the first step towards becoming it; and it is safest, on the whole, to treat people as better than they are, if, perchance, conscience may shame them into being what they are believed, than to check all hope, paralyse all aspiration, and irritate them, by the slow pressure of contemptuous incredulity, into becoming actually as bad as they are supposed to be. Thus, if the young women to whom has fallen the lot of domestic service, of making homes comfortable, and especially of taking care of children, could once be made to feel their own importance as a class — their infinite means of usefulness — I think it would stimulate them into a far higher feeling of self-respect and true respectability, and make them of double value to the community at large.

What do you "go to service" for? — Wages, of

course: the object being how much money you can earn, and how easy a place you can get for it. Character is likewise indispensable to you; so you seek out good families, and keep in them for a certain length of time. Meanwhile, the most energetic and sensible among you try to learn as much as lies in your way — but only as a means of bettering yourselves. "To better yourself," is usually held a satisfactory reason for quitting the most satisfactory place and the kindest of mistresses.

On the whole, the bond between you and "missis" is a mere bargain — a matter of pounds, shillings, and pence; you do just as much as she exacts, or as you consider your wages justify her in expecting from you — not a particle more. As to rights, privileges, and perquisites, it is not unfrequently either a daily battle or a sort of armed treaty between kitchen and parlour. The latter takes no interest in the former, except to see that you do your work and keep your place: while you on your part, except for gossip or curiosity, are comfortably indifferent to "the family." You leave or stay just as it suits them, or yourself, get through a prescribed round of work, are tolerably well-behaved, *civil, honest* — at least in great matters — and tell no

lies, or only as many white ones as will answer your purposes. And so you go on, passing from "place" to "place," resting nowhere, responsible nowhere; sometimes marrying, and dropping into a totally different sphere, but oftener still continuing in the same course from year to year, laying by little enough, either in wages or attachment; yet doing very well, in your own sense of the term, till sickness or old age overtakes you, and then — where are you?

I have read somewhere that in our hospitals and lunatic asylums there is, next to governesses, no class so numerous as that of female domestic servants.

Remember, I am referring not to the lower degrees, but to the respectable among you — those who can always command decent wages and good situations, so long as they are capable of taking them. Of the meaner class, ignorant, stupid, drifted from household to household, from pure incapacity to do or to learn anything, or expelled disgracefully thence for want of (poor wretches! were they ever taught it?) a sense of the common moral necessities of society, which objects to the open breach of at least the sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth commandments — of these unhappy

dregs of your sisterhood, I cannot now venture to speak. I speak of those, born of respectable parents, starting in service with good prospects, able, generally, to read and write, and gifted with sufficient education and intelligence to make them a blessing to themselves and all about them, if their intelligence were not so often degraded into mere "sharpness," for want of that quality — rare in all classes, but rarest in yours — moral conscientiousness.

Why is it that, especially in large towns, a "clever" servant is almost sure to turn out badly? Why do mistresses complain that, while one can get a decent servant; a good-natured servant, a servant who "does her work pretty well, with plenty of looking after," a conscientious servant is with difficulty, if at all, to be found?

By conscientious, I mean one who does her duty — that is, the general business of her calling — not merely for wages or a character, or even for the higher motive of "pleasing missis," but for the highest of all motives — because it *is* her duty. Because, to cook a dinner, with care and without waste; to keep a house clean and orderly in every corner, seen or not seen; to be scrupulously honest and truthful, in the smallest

as in the greatest things; to abstain from pert answers in the parlour, squabbles in the kitchen, and ill-natured tittle-tattle about her fellow-servants or the family — concern not merely her position as a servant, but her conduct and character as a human being, accountable to God as much as the greatest woman that ever was born.

"Oh, that's fine talking!" you may say; "but what can *I* do? what can be expected of *me* — only a poor servant?"

Only a poor servant! *Only* a person whom a whole household is obliged to trust, more or less, with its comfort, order, property, respectability, peace, health — I was going to add, life; who, in times of sickness or trouble, knows more of its secrets than nearest acquaintance; who is aware of all its domestic weaknesses, faults, and vexations; to whom the "skeleton" said to be in every house must necessarily be a thing guessed at, if not only too familiar; on whom master, mistress, children, or friend must be daily dependent for numerous small comforts and attentions, scarcely known, perhaps, until they are missed. Only a poor servant! Why, no living creature has more opportunity of doing good or evil, and becoming to

others either a blessing or a curse, than a "poor servant!"

Not if she is a mere bird of passage, flitting from roof to roof, indifferent to everything save what she may pick up to feather her nest with by the way. Not if she starts with the notion that "missis" and she are to be always at war, or on the alert against mutual encroachments, anxious only which can get the most out of the other. Not if she takes to fawning and flattering, humouring her mistress's weak points, and laughing at her behind her back; betraying the follies or misfortunes of one household into another; carrying on a regular system of double-faced hypocrisy, and fancying she is getting her revenge, and degrading her injurers, when, in fact, she more, much more, degrades herself.

These are the things which make servants despised; not because they are servants, but because the most of them, if they assume any moral standard at all, hold one so far below that of the class above them, that this class learns to regard and treat them as an inferior order of beings.

"What can you expect from a servant?" said to me a lady with whom I often used to argue

the matter — a good and noble-minded woman, too, among whose few prejudices was this, fixed and immutable, against the whole race of domestics.

What do I expect from a servant? Why, precisely what I exact from myself — the same honesty of word and act, the same chastity and decency of behaviour, self-government in temper and speech, and propriety of dress and manner according to our respective stations.

Therefore, in any disputed point, I, as being probably the more educated, older, if not wiser of the two, feel bound as much as possible to put myself in her place, to try and understand her feelings and character, before I judge her, or legislate for her. I try in all things to set her an example to follow, rather than abuse her for faults and failings which she has sense enough to see I am just as liable to as she. I would rather help her in the right way, than drive her into it, whip in hand, and take another road myself Reprove, I ought, and will, as often as she requires it; but reproof is one thing, scolding another: she should never see that I find fault merely from bad temper, or for the pleasure (?) of scolding. Authority I must have: it is for her good as well as mine that

there should be only one mistress in the house, to whom obedience must be implicitly rendered, and whose domestic regulations will admit of no idleness, carelessness, or irregularity; but I would scorn to use my authority unjustly, or wantonly, or unkindly, simply for the sake of asserting it. If it is worth anything in itself, she will soon learn that it is not to be disputed.

And generally, rule, order, and even fair reproof, are among the last things that servants complain of. Selfishness, stinginess, want of consideration for others, are much oftener the fruitful source of all kinds of domestic rebellion, or the distrust which is worse than any open fight — the sense of gnawing injustice, which destroys all respect and attachment between "upstairs" and "down-stairs."

And yet the servant is often very unjust, too. Cook, who has only to dress the dinner, and neither to work for it nor pay for it, turns up her nose at missis's "meanness," *i. e.* displeasure at waste or extravagance — cook, who, if any crash came, has only to look out for another place; while missis has her five children, whose little mouths must be filled, and little *bodies must be clothed*, and "master," whom it breaks

her heart to see coming in from the City, haggard, tired, and cross — a crossness he cannot help, poor man! — or sitting down with a pitiful patience, sick and sad, almost wishing, save for her and the children, that he could lay his head on her shoulder and die! What does cook in the kitchen, fat and comfortable, know of all these things — of the agonised struggle for position and character — nay, mere bread — which makes the days and nights of thousands of the professional classes one long battle for life?

Also, the pretty housemaid, who has her regular work and periodical holiday, with her "young man" coming faithfully on Sundays, about whom, should he turn out false, she rarely makes a fuss, but quickly takes up with another; she being essentially practical, and mental suffering being happily out of her line. Little she guesses of all the conflicts, torments, and endurances which fall to the lot of natures whom a different cultivation, if not a finer organisation, has rendered more alive to another sort of trouble — that anguish of spirit which is worse than any bodily pain. Little she knows, when she comes in singing to dust

the parlour, of many a cruel scene transacted there; or of many an hour of mortal agony, bitter as death, yet sharpened by the full consciousness of youth and life, which has been spent in the pretty room, outside which she grumbles so, because "miss *will* keep her door locked, and it'll be dinner time afore ever a body can get the beds made."

Servants should make allowance for these things, and many more which they neither know nor understand. They should respect, not out of blind subservience, but mere common sense, the great difference which their narrower education and mode of thought often places between them and "the family," in its pleasures, tastes, and necessities, and, above all, in its sufferings. This difference must exist: in the happiest homes, cares and anxieties must be for ever arising, like sea-waves, to be breasted or avoided, or dashed against and broken, as may be; and against these the servant must bear her part as well as the mistress. But it is, and ought to be, something to know how often a word or look of respectful sympathy, a quiet little attention, an unofficious observance of one's comfort in trifles, will, in times of trouble, go direct to

the mistress's heart, with a soothing influence of which the servant has not the slightest idea, and which is never afterwards forgotten.

"Better is a friend that is near than a brother afar off;" and better, many a time, is the silent kindness of some domestic, who, from long familiarity, understands one's peculiarities, than the sympathy of many an outside friend, who only rubs against one's angles, sharpened by sickness or pain, and often, unintentionally, hurts more by futile comforting than by total neglect.

A word on one branch of female service, undeniably the most important of all — the care and management of children.

I have always, from fond experience, held that child to be the happiest who never had a nursery-maid — only a mother. But this lot is too felicitous to fall to many, and perhaps, after all, would not be in reality so Utopian as in idea — particularly to the mothers. So let us grant hired nurses to be a natural necessity of civilisation.

Poor things! they certainly need consideration, for they have much to bear. Children are charming — in the abstract; but one sometimes sees the petted

cherubs of the drawingroom the little fiends of the nursery, exhibiting, almost before they can speak, passions which would tempt one to believe in original sin, did not education commence with existence. Yet whatever the mysterious law of sin may be that Adam made us liable for, it is possible to bring even infants under the dominion of that law of love — given by the Second Adam — to Whom little children came. And how? By *practising it ourselves.*

Ay; making allowance for the necessary shortcomings of all young things, just entered on the experience of life, from kittens to boys, the former being much the least troublesome of the two, I never once knew or heard of a case of irredeemably "naughty" children, in regard to whom parents or nurses, or both, were not originally and principally to blame. I never saw a fretful, sullen girl, who had not been made so by selfishness and ill-humour on the part of others, or by tantalising restrictions and compelled submission, hard enough at any age, but especially in childhood. I never kew a revengeful boy, who had not first had the Cain-like spirit put into him by some taunting voice or uplifted hand — *not* a baby-hand; *teaching him that* what others did he might do, and

that the blow he smarted from was exactly the same sort of pain, and dealt in the same spirit, as that he delighted to inflict on nurse or brother, feeling out of his fierce little heart that this was the sole consolation left him for his half-understood but intolerable wrongs.

Does ever any man or woman remember the feeling of being "whipped" — as a child — the fierce anger, the insupportable ignominy, the longing for revenge, which blotted out all thought of contrition for the fault in rebellion against the punishment? With this recollection on their own parts, I can hardly suppose any parents venturing to inflict it — certainly not allowing its infliction by another, under any circumstances whatever. A nurse-maid or domestic of any sort, once discovered to have lifted up her hand against a child, ought to meet instant severe rebuke, and, on a repetition of the offence, instant dismissal.

A firm will the nurse must have — which the child will obey, knowing it must be obeyed; but it should be with her no less than with the parents, a loving will always. I will not suppose any young woman so mean and cowardly as to wreak her whims and tempers, or those of her mistress, on the helpless

little sinner, who, however annoying, is after all such a very small sinner. I cannot believe she will find it so very hard to love the said sinner, who clings about her helplessly night and day, in the total dependence that of itself produces love. And surely, remembering her own childhood and its events — such nothings now: of such vast moment then, its unjust punishments, unremedied wrongs, and harshly-exacted sacrifices — things which in their results may have affected her temper for years, and even yet are unforgotten — she will strive as much as possible to put herself in her nursling's place, to look at the world from his point of view, and never, as people often do, to expect from him a degree of perfection which one rarely finds even in a grown person; above all, never to expect from him anything that she does not practise herself.

It will be seen that I hold this law of kindness as the Alpha and Omega of education. I once asked one — in his own house a father in everything but the name, his authority unquestioned, his least word held in reverence, his smallest wish obeyed — "How did you ever manage to bring up these children?" He said: "By *love*."

That is the question. It is because people have so

little love in them, so little purity and truth, self-control and self-denial, that they make such frightful errors in the bringing up of children. When I go from home to home of the middle classes, and see the sort of rule or misrule there, the countless evil influences, physical and spiritual, against which children have to struggle, I declare I often wonder that in the rising generation there should be any good men and women. And when I glance down the *Times* column of "Want Places," and speculate how few of these "nurses," upper and under "girls," and "nursery-maids," have the smallest knowledge of their responsibility, or care about fulfilling it, my wonder is, that the new generation should grow up to manhood and womanhood at all.

This responsibility — if the nurse ever reflects on it — how awful it is! To think that whatever the man may become, learned and great, worldly or wicked, he is at present only the child, courting her smile and coming to her for kisses, or hiding from her frown and sobbing on her neck, "I will be good, I will be good!" That, be she old or young, clever or ignorant, ugly or pretty, she has, next to the mother — sometimes before the mother, though that is a sad

thing to see — this all-powerful influence over him, stronger than any he will afterwards allow or own. That it rests with herself how she uses it, whether wisely and tenderly, for the guidance and softening of his nature, or harshly and capriciously, after a fashion which may harden and brutalise him, and make him virtually disbelieve in love and goodness for the remainder of his existence.

Truly, in this hard world, which they must only too soon be thrust into, it is more essential even for boys than girls that, in the dawn of life, while women solely have the management of them, they should be accustomed to this law of love — love paramount and never ceasing, clearly discernible in the midst of restraint, reproof, and even punishment — love that tries to be always as just as it is tender, and never exercises one of its rights for its own pleasure and good, but for the child's. To the nurse, unto whom it does not come by instinct, as it does to parents, the practice of it may be difficult — very difficult — but God forbid it should be impossible.

And what a reward there is in this, beyond any form of service — to a woman! Respect and gratitude *of parents; consi*deration from all in the house; affec-

tion, fresh, full, and free, and sweet as only a child's love can be. Trying as the nurse-maid's life is, countless as are her vexations and pains, how many a childless wife or solitary old maid has envied her, playing at romps for kisses, deafened with ever-sounding rills of delicious laughter all day, and lying down at night with a soft sleepy thing breathing at her side, or wakened of a morning with two little arms tight round her neck, smotheringly expressing a wealth of love that kingdoms could not buy.

And when she grows an old woman, if, as often happens to domestic servants, she does not marry, but remains in service all her life, it must be her own fault if nurse's position is not an exceedingly happy and honoured one. Not perhaps, in our modern times, after the fashion of her order in novels and plays — from *Juliet's* nurse downwards — but still abounding in comfort and respect. Most likely, she still lives in the family — anyhow, it will be strange if her grown-up "children" do not now and then come and see her, to gossip over those old times, which grow the more precious the further we leave them behind. In time these children's children — with their other parent, who knew not nurse, and whom nurse still views with

rather suspicious curiosity — come and chatter to her, eager to hear all about "pa" or "ma;" how "ma" looked when she was a little baby; whether "pa" was a good boy or a naughty boy, some thirty odd years ago. And — a remarkable moral fact! — the chances are that "pa" will gravely confess to the latter; while old nurse, seeing all things through the softening glass of time, will protest that neither he nor any of the children ever gave her the least trouble since they were born!

I have said a good deal, and yet it seems as if I had almost left the subject where I found it, it is so wide. Let me end it in words which, coming into my mind now, transcend all mine, and yet, I trust, have been made the foundation of them; in which case I need not fear. Words open alike to master and servant — studied by how few, yet in which lies the only law of life for all: —

"*Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the* REWARD."

CHAPTER VI.

The Mistress of a Family.

THE *house-mother!* what a beautiful, comprehensive word it is! how suggestive of all that is wise and kindly, comfortable and good! Surely, whether the lot comes to her naturally, in the happy gradations of wifehood and motherhood — or as the maiden-mistress of an adopted family, — or, as one could find many instances in this our modern England, when the possession of a large fortune, received or earned, gives her, with all the cares and duties, many of the advantages of matronhood — every such woman must acknowledge that it is a solemn as well as a happy thing to be the mistress of a family.

Easy, pleasant, and beautiful as it is to obey, development of character is not complete when the person is fitted only to obey. There comes a time in most women's lives when they have to learn how to govern — first, themselves, then those about them. I say, to learn; because it has to be learnt. Love of arbitrary

power may come by instinct; as in the very youngest children you may see one fierce little spirit to which all the rest, whether older or younger, succumb: but to domineer and to rule are two distinct arts, proceeding often from totally opposite characters.

The most of women are, in their youth at least, by both habit and temperament, as I once heard it expressed by a very acute thinker — decidedly "adjective." Few of them have ever had the chance of becoming a "noun substantive" — (whether or not that be a natural or enviable position). They have been accustomed all their lives hitherto to be governed, if not guarded; protected or unprotected, as may be; but rarely placed in circumstances where they had actively to assume the guardianship or rule of others. This then, if it falls to their lot, they have to acquire, difficultly, painfully: often with no preparation, or with what is worse than none, a complete ignorance that there is anything to be acquired! They expect all is to come quite naturally — the due arrangement and superintendence of a house — the regulation of an income — the guidance and control of servants.

And yet, every family is a little kingdom in itself: *the members and* followers of which are often as hard

to manage as any of the turbulent governments whose discords convulse our world. "Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child!" And woe to thee, O household, when thy mistress is — worse than a child — a foolish, ignorant, and incapable woman.

With families, as with kingdoms, one of the principal evidences of misgovernment is at the working root of the little community — the servants. Why is it that in one half of the families one knows, the grand burden of complaint is — servants? Is the fault altogether on one side? — which side, either party being left to decide: or is it a natural consequence of their relative positions, as ruler and ruled? a state of things equally hateful and inevitable, for which nobody is to blame?

Let us see — taking at random the most prominent specimens of mistresses of families, which present themselves to every one's notice who is at all familiar with middle-class society. These, I must distinctly state, are in every case generalisations of a class, and of no personal application; which, indeed, would mar the whole moral of these imaginary portraits, by giving results and unfairly omitting causes.

For instance, there is Mrs. Smith. You will never

once enter that lady's house without hearing of a change in its domestic arrangements; you will hardly knock at the door four successive weeks, without its being opened by a strange damsel. To count the number of servants Mrs. Smith has had since her marriage, would puzzle her eldest boy, even though he is just going into his multiplication-table. Out of some scores, surely all could not have been so bad; yet, to hear her, no imps of Satan in female form could be worse than those with which her house has been haunted — cooks who sold the dripping, and gave the roast-meat to the policeman; housemaids who could only scrub and scour, and wait at table and clean plate, and keep tidy to answer the door, and who actually had never learned to sew neatly, or to get up fine linen! Nurses wickedly pretty, or thinking themselves so, who had the atrocious impudence to buy a bonnet "just like my last new one," with flowers inside! Poor Mrs. Smith! Her whole soul is engrossed in the servant-question. Her whole life is a domestic battle — of the mean, scratch-and snap, spit-and-snarl kind. She has a handsome house; she gives good wages — that is, her liberal husband does — but not a servant will stay *with her.*

And why? Because she is not fitted to be a mistress. She cannot rule — she can only order about; she cannot reprove — she can only scold. Possessing no real dignity, she is always trying to assert its semblance; having little or no education, she is the hardest of all judges upon ignorance. Though so tenacious of her prerogative, that she dismissed Sally Baines for imitating missis's bonnet — (Heaven forgive you, Mrs. Smith! but do you know where you might find that poor pretty sixteen-year old child *now?*) — still, the more intelligent of her servants soon find out that she is "not a lady;" that, in fact, if one were to strip off her satin gowns, and sell her carriage, and make her inhabit the basement-story instead of the drawing-room of her handsome house, Mrs. Smith would be not one whit superior to her own cook. Her quick-witted parlour-maid is really her superior, and fully aware of it too, as you may see from the way in which she contrives to wind missis round her little finger, get her own way entirely, and rule the house-arrangements from attic to cellar. This being not unprofitable, she will probably outstay many of the other servants — not because she is any better than the rest, but merely cleverer.

Miss Brown's household is on quite a different plan. You will never hear the small domestic "rows" — the petty squabbles between mistress and maid, injustice on one side and impertinence on the other. Miss Brown would never dream of quarrelling with "a servant," any more than with her dog or cat, or some other inferior animal. She strictly fulfils her duty as mistress; gives regular wages, — very moderate, certainly, for her income is much below both her birth and her breeding; exacts no extra service; and is rigidly particular in allowing her servants the due holidays — namely, to church every other Sunday, and a day out once a-month. Her housekeeping is economical without being stingy; everything is expected to go on like clock-work; if otherwise, immediate dismissal follows, for Miss Brown dislikes to have to find fault, even in her own lofty and distant way. She is a conscientious, honourable lady, who exacts no more than she performs; and her servants respect her. But they stand in awe of her; they do not love her. There is a wide gulf between their humanity and hers — you never would believe that they and she shared the same flesh and blood of womanhood, and would end in the same dust and ashes. She is well served, well obeyed, and

justly; but — and that is justice, too — she is neither sympathised with nor confided in. Perhaps this truth may have struck home to her sometimes; as when her maid, who had been ill unnoticed for months, in waiting on her one morning dropped down, and — died that night; or when, the day there came news of the battle of Inkermann, she sat hour after hour with the *Times* in her lap, in her gloomy, lonely dining-room, and not a soul came nigh her to ask or learn from her speechless looks "what of young Captain Brown?"

In the Jones's highly respectable family are most respectable servants, clever, quick, attentive, and fully conscious of their own value and capabilities. They dress quite as finely as "the family," go out with parasols on Sundays, and have their letters directed "Miss." They guard with jealousy all their perquisites and privileges — from the tradesmen's Christmas-boxes, and the talk outside the nearly-closed front-door with unlimited "followers," to the dearly-prized right of a pert answer to missis when she ventures to complain. And missis — a kind, easy soul — is rather afraid of so doing; and endures many an annoyance, together with a few real wrongs, rather than sweep her house with the besom of righteous destruction, and annihilate

in their sprouting evils that will soon grow up like rampant weeds. This is no slight regret to Mrs. Jones's friends, who see that a little judicious authority, steadily and unvaryingly asserted — a little quiet exercise of will, instead of fidgety or nervous fault-finding and needless suspiciousness, would make matters all straight, and reduce this excellent and liberal establishment, from the butler down to the little kitchen-maid, to the safe level of a limited monarchy. Instead of which there is a loose sway, which often borders upon that most dangerous of all governments — domestic republicanism.

This last is the government at Mrs. Robinson's. She has long let the reins go — leaned back, and slumbered. Where her household will drive to, Heaven only knows! The house altogether takes care of itself. The mistress is too gentle to blame anybody for anything — too lazy to do anything herself, or show anybody else how to do it. I suppose she has eyes, yet you might write your name in dust-tracks on every bit of furniture in her house. She doubtless likes to wear a clean face and a decent gown, for she has tastes not unrefined; yet in Betty, her maid-of-all-work, *both these advantages* are apparently impossible

luxuries. Mrs. Robinson can't, or believes she can't, afford what is called a "good" servant — that is, an efficient, responsible woman, who requires equivalent wages for valuable services; therefore she does with poor Betty, a very well-meaning girl, though quite incompetent for the duties she undertakes, and never likely to be instructed therein. For it never seems to strike Betty, or her mistress either, that though poverty may be inevitable, dirt and tatters are not — that a girl, if ever so ignorant, can generally be taught — a house, if ever so small and ill-furnished, can at least be clean — a dinner, if ever so plain, nay, scanty, may be well cooked and well arranged; and however the servants fall short, every mistress has always her own intelligent brain, and has, at the worst, her own pair of active hands. Did you ever consider that last possibility, my good Mrs. Robinson? Would Betty honour you less if, every morning, she saw you dust a chair or two, or hunt out lurking ambushes of spiders — shaming her into knowledge and industry by the conviction, that what she left undone her mistress would certainly do? Would you be less amiable in your husband's eyes by the discovery, that it was you yourself who cooked, and then taught Betty to coo

his comfortable dinner? Would he have less pleasure in petting your dainty fingers for seeing on them a few needle-marks, caused by the sewing of tidy chair-covers, or the mending of clean threadbare carpets, so as to make the best of his plain, quiet home, where Heaven has at once denied the blessing and spared the responsibility of children? But you may be as ignorant as Betty herself. I am afraid you are. Let me give you a golden rule — "Never expect a servant to do that which you cannot do, or, if necessary, will learn to do, yourself."

Mrs. Johnson, now, will be a very good illustration of this. I doubt if she is any richer than Mrs. Robinson; for a few years after her marriage, I know it was very uphill-work indeed with the young couple; especially for the wife, who, married at nineteen, was as ignorant as any school-girl. She and her cook are reported to have studied Mrs. Glass together. To this day, I fancy the praise of any special dinner would be modestly received as conjointly due to "missis and me." So, doubtless would any grand effect in household arrangements, though, where all goes on so smoothly and orderly, that the most sudden visitor *would only necessitate* an extra knife and fork, and a

clean pair of sheets in the spare room, there is not much opportunity for any *coup d'état* in the housemaid-line. As for the nursery-staff — but since her boys could walk alone, Mrs. Johnson has abolished the nursery altogether. If she has no more children, these two lads will have the infinite blessing of never being "managed" by any womenkind save their mother. Of course it is a busy, and often hard life for her; and her handmaidens know it. They see her employed from morning to night, happy and merry enough, but always employed. They themselves would be ashamed to be lazy; they would do anything in the world to lighten things to missis. If little delicate Fred is ailing, Jane will sit up half the night with him, and still get up at five next morning. Mary, the cook, does not grumble at any accidental waiting, if missis, in her sewing, has the slightest need of Jane. Both would work their fingers to the bone any day to save her the least trouble or pain. Not a cloud comes across her path — not a day of illness — her own or her little ones' — shadows her bright looks, but is felt as an absolute grief in the kitchen. Jane's face, as she opens the front door, is a sufficient indication to all friends as how things are with "the family;" and if you, being

very intimate, make any chance inquiry of Mary in the street, ten to one she will tell you everything Mrs. Johnson has done, and exactly how she has looked, for a week past, ending with a grave, respectful remark, ventured in right of her own ten years of eldership, that she "is afraid missis is wearing herself out, and would you please to come and see her?"

And missis, on her side, returns the kindly interest. She likes to hear anything and everything that her damsels may have to tell, from the buying of a new gown to the birth of a new nephew. Any relatives of theirs who may appear in the kitchen, she generally goes to speak to, and welcomes always kindly. She is glad to encourage family affection, believing it to be quite as necessary and as beautiful in a poor housemaid as in a sentimental lady. Love, also. She has not the smallest objection to let that young baker come in to tea on Sundays, entering honestly at the front-door, without need of sneaking behind area-railings. And if, on such Sundays, Jane is rather absent and awkward, with a tendency to forget the spoons, and put hot plates where cold should be, her mistress pardons all, and tempers master's indignation by *reminding him of a* certain summer, not ten years back

when —, &c. Upon which he kisses his little wife, and grows mild.

Thus the family have no dread of "followers," no visions of burglarious sweethearts introduced by the kitchen-window, or tribes of locust "cousins" creating a famine in the larder. Having always won confidence, Mrs. Johnson has little fear of being deceived. When pretty Jane can make up her mind, doubtless there will occur that most creditable event to both parties — the maid being married from her mistress's house. Of course, Jane would be a great loss, or Mary either; but Mary is growing middle-aged, and is often seen secretly petting Master Fred, as only old maid-servants do pet the children of "the family." Freddy says, she has promised never to leave him; and her mistress, who probably knows as much of Mary's affairs as anybody, does not think it likely she ever will.

The Johnson household is the best example I know of the proper relation between kitchen and parlour. True, Jane and Mary are estimable women — might have been such in any "place;" but I will do human nature the justice to believe, that the class of domestic servants contains many possible Janes and Marys, &

only their good qualities could be elicited by a few more Mrs. Johnsons.

It is an obvious law, that any movement for social advancement must necessarily commence in the higher class, and gradually influence the lower. By higher and lower, I mean simply as regards moral and intellectual cultivation, which, continued through generations and become a habit of life, makes, and is the only thing that does or ought to make, the difference between master and servant, patrician and plebeian. Mrs. Thomson, descended from the clan Robertson, a very superior family, has a great deal more chance of being a lady than Peg Thompson her nursery-maid, whose father, grandfather, &c., have been farm-labourers. But if, by any of her not rare freaks, Dame Nature should have placed in Peg's uncouth body the soul of a gentlewoman; together with that rare quality of rising, which, in spite of circumstances, enables many refined minds to reach their natural level — if so, Mrs. Thomson should not have the slightest objection to assist that desirable end in every possible way. Nay, finally, it might be rather a pleasure to her some day to sit at table with Miss Margaret Thompson; and she should *altogether scorn* the behaviour of that fine gentleman

who once "cut" honest Dodsley the publisher-footman — of whom the meek old fellow only observed: "Yes, he knows me; I used to wait behind his chair."

But since the laws of nature and of circumstance have made some to be mistresses and others servants — giving to the one incalculably more chances of superiority than the other, would it not be as well if more ladies would try to prove this superiority instead of resting content in the mere assertion thereof? The proverb asserts, "A good mistress will make a good servant." Whether this is possible or not, all will agree that the best servant in the world cannot make a good mistress.

The reformatory process must necessarily commence with the superior.

Also the root of all improvement must be the mistress's own conviction, religious and sincere, of the truth, more than once already urged here, but which cannot be too often referred to, that she and her servants share one common womanhood: alike in its mental and physical weaknesses; in its capabilities of advancement and deterioration; in its tempers, passions, and prejudices: with aims, hopes, or interests distinctly defined, and pursued with equal eagerness; with a life

here, meant as a school for the next life; with an immortal soul.

A lady who can once be made to feel that, so far as any human soul can be made responsible for another, she is responsible for that of every domestic who enters her house, has gained one step from which she is not likely ever to backslide. And if accountable for the soul — the better part, — so also for the body. Since, with advanced knowledge, we are all now beginning to recognise — some with the stolid assent of materialism, and some with the Christian's holy wonder at this human machine, made too wonderfully to be made for nothing, and by no one, — how mysteriously soul and body act and react upon one another; how one half of the shortcomings of the spirit springs from mere bodily causes; and how a healthy soul can stimulate even the poorest and most unsound dwelling-house of flesh and blood into something of its own beauty and divineness.

And yet there is a saying that one sometimes hears, and sees silently in action perpetually — "Anything will do for the servants." Kitchen and parlour are placed on quite a different footing; not only with *regard to coarser food* — reasonable enough sometimes,

when the parlour has nice or sickly tastes, and the kitchen is blessed with the wholesome omnivorous appetite of hard work and an easy mind — but in the regular routine of daily life. "Late to bed and early to rise," yet still expected to be "both healthy and wise;" compelled to sleep in damp, heat, uncleanliness, or ill-ventilation — anything is good enough for a "servant's bedroom;" allowed no time for personal attention, sewing, or mending, yet required to be always "tidy;" kept at work constantly, without regard to how much and what sort of work each person's strength can bear; yet supposed to be capable of working on for ever, without that occasional intermixture of "play," — not idleness, but wholesome amusement — without which every human being grows dull, dispirited, falls into ill-humour, and, finally into ill-health. Truly it often makes one's heart ache to think of the sort of life even well-meaning mistresses make their servants lead; and it would be curious, were it not so melancholy, to pause and consider, if in all one's acquaintance there are half-a-dozen ladies under whom, did fate compel, one would choose to "go into service."

My dear madam — who may be opening your eyes

widely at this heterodox view of the question — you have no right to keep a servant at all unless you can keep her comfortable. You did not buy her, body and soul, like a negro slave; you only took her on hired service, to fulfil certain duties, which you must exact from her kindly and firmly, for her good as well as yours: but you have no right to any more. Except so far as nature and education have instituted a difference between you, you are not justified in placing either her enjoyments or necessities on a lower level than your own. The same sanitary laws, of physical and mental well-being, apply to you both; and neither can break them, or be allowed to break them, with impunity.

Moral laws, also. Mrs. Smith thinks it is against her that poor Sally Baines sinned in the matter of the bonnet. Foolish Mrs. Smith! Suppose you were to purchase at Swan and Edgar's that hundred-guinea Cachemire labelled "the Queen's choice" — whom would you harm, her Majesty or yourself? So, when your Emma or Betsy buys a silk gown and a twelve-shilling parasol, she errs, and grievously, too: but it is against herself. She lowers her own self-respect by *striving to* maintain a false position; wastes in shabby

showiness the money that she ought to lay up for sickness, old age, or marriage, and the happy duty of helping others; loses the simple neatness befitting the respectable maid-servant, and becomes ridiculous as the sham fine-lady.

But in this complaint, only too general, of servants "dressing above their place," the mistress's own example is the best warning and reproof: a thing, my poor Mrs. Smith, which it would be vain to look for from you. Equally vain in another matter, which applies as stringently to that wretched Sally Baines — whom, if she now came drunk and flaunting to your area-gate, you would hustle away in charge of X 25 — as to your own little daughter, whom you hope one day to see Mrs. Somebody, and will take all available maternal means to that desirable end.

You do not think it, but the kitchen is made of flesh and blood as well as the parlour. However you may insist upon "No followers allowed," Emma will meet her sweetheart round the corner, and cook will startle your nerves after five years' service with "Please suit yourself marm, as I'm a-going to be married." Happy for you if no worse occurs than this. For you are exacting an injustice — an impossibility.

you are instituting a state of things which, from its very unnaturalness, gives a premium to deceit and immorality. Love — nay, I beg your pardon; you don't understand what that word means — but *courting*, which looks so pretty in the drawing-room, you treat as a crime in the kitchen; and therefore it is very likely to become such. An honest lover — as much Emma's right as your own when you took up with Mr. Smith — you degrade into a "follower," who has to sneak about areas, hide in coal-cellars, and be gossiped with behind doors. Consequently, there can be no inquiry into his character, no open acknowledgment of an honourable attachment, which neither mistress nor maid need ever be ashamed of; everything goes on underhand, and if discovered at all, is generally in such a miserable form as to make prudent Mrs. Smiths firmer than ever in their impossible edict, never obeyed. Whilst other women, accustomed to regard love and marriage according to the standard of the better classes, are shocked at the low tone of thought on such subjects, which inevitably results in that low tone of morals almost universally prevalent among the ranks from which female servants are recruited.

It is worth while trying whether — since dark

deeds and ill feelings can only be conquered by being brought to the light — mistresses should not make the experiment of saying, as every mother ought to say to her daughters — (alas, how few do! and what a train of horrible evils often results from that want of confidence between mother and child!) — "Be honest with me. I don't expect from you more than human nature is capable of. I expect you to fall in love and be married; all I desire is that you should love worthily, and marry wisely. Only be honest. No falsehoods, no concealments of any kind. Let everything be plain, open, and above-board; tell the truth, and don't be afraid."

Perhaps, then we should have less of these frightful cases of shame and sorrow, or those hasty marriages, of which one so often hears — when a decent, respectable girl, after a few months' wedlock, comes back to her old mistress, ragged and destitute, with a husband in jail for bigamy, or against whom she has to swear the peace, for that brutal ill-usage which makes us English disgraced abroad as "the nation that beats its wives."

In households as in states there must be one ruling head — and there ought to be but one. Every person

knows what sort of system that is, which I have called domestic republicanism. Whether or not it is best for kingdoms, in families the only safe form of government is autocracy.

And the autocrat should decidedly be the lady, the mistress. The master, be he father, husband, or brother, has quite enough to do without-doors. He is the bread-winner; the woman, the bread-keeper, server, and expender. Nature as well as custom has — save in very exceptional cases — instituted this habit of life, and any alteration of it, making mamma attend the law-courts and Exchange, or drive about on a series of medical visits, while papa stays at home to cook the dinner and nurse the babies, would assuredly be very bad, if not for himself, for the dinner and the babies.

No. We of the "softer" sex, though not by any means really so soft as we are complimented and coaxed into appearing, have no call, and, mostly, no desire to force ourselves into the province of men. We feel that we are not fitted for it. Female doctors — though all honour be to those heroic, self-sacrificing women, who are capable of undertaking such a profes-*sion* — *female* missionaries, travellers, and life-long

devotees to science, art, or philanthropy, are and always will be rare and peculiar cases, not to be judged by ordinary rules. The average number of us are content to leave to men their own proper place: but none the less resolutely ought we to keep our own — one of the first "rights" of which is, the supreme rule in all domestic concerns.

A man has no business to meddle in the management of the house. No business, except through hard necessity, or the saddest incompetency on the part of others, to poke over the weekly bills, and insist on knowing what candles are per pound, whether the washing is done at home or abroad, and what he is going to have every day for dinner. He who voluntarily and habitually interferes in these things must be a rather small-minded gentleman, uncommonly inconvenient to his family and servants. Perhaps to more than they: since a man who is always "muddling about" at home is rarely a great acquisition to the world outside.

I once heard a married lady say, with great glee and satisfaction: "Oh, Mr. — saves me all trouble in housekeeping; he orders dinner, and goes to the butcher's to choose it, too: pays all the bills, and keeps

the weekly accounts: he never wants me to do anything." Thought I privately, "My dear, if I were you I should be very much ashamed both of myself and Mr. —."

When a house boasts both master and mistress, each should leave to the other the appointed work, and both qualify themselves rightly to fulfil the same, abstaining as much as possible from mutual interference. A man who can trust his wife or his housekeeper should no more meddle with her home concerns than she should pester him with questions about his business. No doubt, countless occasions will arise when he will be thankful and glad to take counsel with her in worldly cares; while she may have to remember all her life long, and never think of without a gush of gratitude and love, some season of sickness or affliction, when he filled his own place and hers too, ashamed of no womanish task, and neither irritated nor humiliated by ever such mean household cares.

A lady of my acquaintance gives it as her *sine quâ non* of domestic felicity, that the "men of the family" should always be absent at least six hours in the day. *And truly a mistress* of a family, however strong her

affection for the male members of it, cannot but acknowledge that this is a great boon. A house where "papa" or "the boys" are always "pottering about," popping in and out at all hours, everlastingly wanting something, or finding fault with something else, is a considerable trial to even feminine patience. And I beg to ask my sex generally — in confidence, of course — if it is not the greatest comfort possible when, the masculine half of the family being cleared out for the day, the house settles down into regular work and orderly quietness until evening?

Also, it is good for them, as well as for us, to have all the inevitable petty domestic "bothers" got over in their absence; to effect which ought to be one of the principal aims of the mistress of a family. Let them, if possible, return to a quiet smiling home, with all its small annoyances brushed away like the dust and cinders from the grate — which, *en passant*, is one of the first requisites to make a fireside look comfortable. It might be as well, too, if the master himself could contrive to leave the worldly mud of the day at the scraper outside his door; however, as these chapters do not presume to lecture the lords of creation, I have nothing more to say on that score.

But she who, the minute an unfortunate man comes home, fastens upon him with a long tale of domestic grievances, real or imagined — how the butcher will never bring the meat in time, and the baker keeps a false account of loaves — how she is sure cook is given to drink, and that Mary's "cousin" had his dinner off "our" mutton yesterday; — why, such a lady deserves all she gets: cold looks, sharp speeches, hasty plunges into the convenient newspaper; perhaps an angry cigar — a walk, with no invitation for her company — or the club. Poor little woman! sitting crying over her lonely fire, not owning that she is wrong, but only that she is very unhappy, and very much ill-used, might one recommend to her notice one golden rule? "Never pester a man with things that he cannot remedy and does not understand." Also, for her own benefit as well as his, a harmless rhyme, true enough of minor vexations, whatever it may be of the greater griefs it so philosophically disposes of: —

"For every evil under the sun
There is a remedy — or there's none.
If there is one, try and find it;
If there isn't, never mind it."

And when he comes in again, honest man! perhaps *a little repentant*, too, there is but one course of

conduct which I recommend to all sensible women, viz. to put her arms round his neck, and — hold her tongue.

But the house-mother has her troubles; ay, be she ever so gifted with that blessed quality of taking them lightly and cheerfully; weighing them at their just value and no more; never tormenting herself and everybody else by that peculiarity of selfish and narrow minds, which makes the breaking of a plate as terrible a calamity as the crash of an empire. No one can hold the reins of family government for ever so brief a time, without feeling what a difficult position it is: how great its daily need of self-control, as the very first means of controlling others; of incessant individual activity, and a personal carrying out of all regulations instituted for the ordering of the establishment, which, unless faithfully observed by the mistress — the eye and heart of the house — are no more than a dead letter to the rest of the establishment.

No doubt this entails considerable self-sacrifice. It is not pleasant for lazy ladies to get breakfast over at that regular early hour, which alone sets a household fairly a-going for the day: nor for unarithmetical ladies, who have always reckoned their accounts by sixpences,

to put down each item, and persevere in balancing periodically receipts and expenditure: nor for weakly, nervous, self-engrossed ladies, to rouse themselves sufficiently to put their house in order, and keep it so; not by occasional spasmodic "setting to rights," but by a general methodical overlooking of all that is going on therein. Yet, unless all this is done, it is in vain to insist on early rising, or grumble about waste, or lecture upon neatness, cleanliness, and order. The servants get to learn that "missis is never in time;" and laugh at her complaints of their unpunctuality. They see no use in good management, or avoidance of waste; — "Missis never knows about anything." She may lecture till she is weary about neatness and cleanliness; — "Just put your head into her room and see!" For all moral qualities, good temper, truth, kindliness, and, above all, conscientiousness, if these are deficient in the mistress, it is idle to expect them from servants, or children, or any members of the family circle.

Yet this fact, so trite that readers may smile at its being urged at all, is the last to be generally acted upon. Mistresses blame all persons about them, and *Providence above* them; — for does it not often virtually

mean that? every thing and every body except themselves. They will not see, that until a woman has done all that is in her power to do, striving with antagonistic circumstances, great and small, and chiefly with her own self, her errors of character, and weaknesses of temperament — until then she has no right to begin blaming anybody. It is vain to attempt showing them, what is plain enough to any unbiassed student of life in the abstract — and this ought to strike solemnly upon the mind of every woman who feels that where much is given much is required — that, however fatally the conduct of the master may affect the external fortunes of a family, there are very few families whose internal mismanagement and domestic unhappiness are not mainly the fault of the mistress.

The *house-mother!* where could she find a nobler title, a more sacred charge? All these souls, given into her hand to be cared for, both in great things and small — if anything can be called small on which rests the comfort of a family; and that to a degree which can never be too much appreciated. For instance, good temper is with many people dependent upon good health; good health upon good digestion,

good digestion upon wholesome, well-prepared food, eaten in peace and pleasantness. Ill-cooked, untidy meals, are as great a cause of bad temper as many a moral wrong; and a person of sensitive physique may be nursed into settled hypochondria by living in close rooms, where the sweet fresh air and sunshine are determinedly shut out, and the foul air as determinedly shut in. While those nervous, irritable temperaments, which, either from the slow deterioration of our race, or our modern error of cultivating the mind at the expense of the body, are getting so common now-a-days, are often driven almost into madness by the non-observance of those ordinary sanitary rules, ignorance or neglect of which, bad enough in anybody, is in the mistress of a family scarcely less than a crime.

Yet most of these short-comings in women, on whom this responsibility has fallen, are by no means intentional. A girl marries early, thinking only how pleasant it is to have a house of one's own, and never once how difficult it is to manage it: perhaps she makes a pride, and her young husband a joke, of her charming ignorance in common things — à la *David* and *Dora Copperfield* — pretty enough while it lasts. *But only picture* these poor little silly *Doras* living,

instead of, happily, dying! Drifting on to middle age — helpless, burdensome wives — lazy, feeble, many-childed mothers; meaning well enough, but incapable of acting upon their good intentions; either sinking into a hopeless indifference, which is not content, or wearing themselves out with weak complainings, which never result in any amendment. Poor dear women! we may pity and pardon, acknowledging their many gentle and estimable qualities; but all the passive sweetness in the world will not make up for active goodness; and there is many a "most amiable woman," who, whatever she might have been in an inferior position, when unhappily she is mistress of a family, by her over-kindness, lazy laxity, and general *laissez-faire*, does as much harm as the greatest shrew who ever embittered the peace of a household.

Power, of whatsoever kind and degree, so that it is just and lawful, is a glorious thing to have, a noble thing to use. But what shall be said for the woman who has had it and thrown it away, or retained it only to misuse it? Woe betide both her and all connected with her! for she has ceased to injure herself alone. Every life that was given her in charge for health of body and mind, peace, comfort, and enjoy-

ment, will assuredly one day rise up in judgment against her. We can imagine such an one, suddenly waking up to the consciousness of all she has done and left undone — what those belonging to her are, and what she might, under God, have made them — crying out in her agony, "Would that I had never been born!"

At present, the happiest thing for her — if there can be any happiness in a self-deception — is, that she really is unaware of her own position — that most humiliating position of a woman who is not mistress in her own family; whose servants disobey or despise her, whose children rule her, whose husband snubs her or neglects her, whose friends and neighbours criticise, compassionate, or laugh at her. Who, though anything but a bad woman, will slip through existence without dignity, effecting little or no real good: at best only patiently borne with and kindly treated while she lives, and her place filled up, some few regretting awhile, but none really missing her, as soon as ever she dies.

What a contrast to that portrait — standing out as true a photograph of nature in this our modern day, *as it did in those* ancient days, under the glowing sun

of the East, "the words of King Lemuel," that "*his mother* taught him."

"Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.

The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that she shall have no need of spoil.

She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.

* * * * *

She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms.

She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff.

She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.

* * * * *

Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.

* * * * *

Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come.

She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.

She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.

Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.

Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.

Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.

Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates."

CHAPTER VII.

Female Friendships.

"And what is Friendship but a name,
A charm that lulls to sleep,
A shade that follows wealth and fame,
And leaves the wretch to weep?"

THIS remark, expressed too tersely and intelligibly to be considered "poetry" now-a-days, must apply to the nobler sex. Few observant persons will allege against ours, that even in its lowest form our friendship is deceitful. Fickle it may be, weak, exaggerated, sentimental — the mere lath-and-plaster imitation of a palace great enough for a demigod to dwell in — but it is rarely false, parasitical, or diplomatic. The countless secondary motives which many men are mean enough to have — nay, to own — are all but impossible to us; impossible from the very faults of our nature — our frivolity, irrationality, and incapacity to seize on more than one idea at the same time. In truth, a sad proportion of us are too empty-headed to be double-minded, too shallow to be insincere. Nay,

even the worst of us being more direct and simple of character than men are, our lightest friendship — the merest passing liking that we decorate with that name — is, while it lasts, more true than the generality of the so-called "friendships" of mankind.

But — and this "but" will, I am aware, raise a whole nest of hornets — from our very peculiarities of temperament, women's friendships are rarely or never so firm, so just, or so enduring, as those of men — *when* you can find them. Damon and Pythias, Orestes and Pylades, Brutus and Cassius — last and loveliest, David and Jonathan, are pictures unmatched by any from our sex, down even to the far-famed ladies of Llangollen. When such a bond really does exist, from its exception to general masculine idiosyncrasies — especially the enormous absorption in and devotion to Number One — from its total absence of sentimentality, its undemonstrativeness, depth, and power, a friendship between two men is a higher thing than between any two women — nay, one of the highest and noblest sights in the whole world. Precisely as, were comparisons not as foolish as they are odious, a truly good man, from the larger capacities of male nature both for virtue and vice, is, in one sense, more good than

any good woman. But this question I leave to controversialists, who enjoy breaking their own heads, or one another's, over a bone of contention which is usually not worth picking after all.

Yet, though dissenting from much of the romance talked about female friendships, believing that two-thirds of them spring from mere idleness, or from that *besoin d'aimer* which, for want of natural domestic ties, makes this one a temporary substitute, Heaven forbid I should so malign my sex as to say they are incapable of an emotion which, in its right form and place, constitutes the strength, help, and sweetness of many, many lives; and the more so because it is one of the first sweetnesses we know.

Probably there are few women who have not had some first friendship, as delicious and almost as passionate as first love. It may not last — it seldom does; but at the time it is one of the purest, most self-forgetful and self-denying attachments that the human heart can experience: with many, the nearest approximation to that feeling called love — I mean love in its highest form, apart from all selfishnesses and sensuousnesses — which in all their after-life they *will ever* know. This girlish friendship, however fleet-

ing in its character, and romantic, even silly, in its manifestations, let us take heed how we make light of, lest we be mocking at things more sacred than we are aware.

And yet, it is not the real thing — not *friendship*, but rather a kind of foreshadowing of love; as jealous, as exacting, as unreasoning — as wildly happy and supremely miserable; ridiculously so to a looker-on, but to the parties concerned, as vivid and sincere as any after-passion into which the girl may fall; for the time being, perhaps long after, colouring all her world. Yet it is but a dream, to melt away like a dream when love appears; or if it then wishes to keep up its vitality at all, it must change its character, temper its exactions, resign its rights: in short, be buried and come to life again in a totally different form. Afterwards, should Laura and Matilda, with a house to mind and a husband to fuss over, find themselves actually kissing the babies instead of one another — and managing to exist for a year without meeting, or a month without letter-writing, yet feel life no blank, and affection a reality still — then their attachment has taken its true shape as friendship, shown itself capable of friendship's distinguishing feature — namely,

tenderness without appropriation; and the women, young or old, will love one another faithfully to the end of their lives.

Perhaps this, which is the test of the sentiment, explains why we thus seldom attain to it, in its highest phase, because nature has made us in all our feelings so intensely personal. We have instincts, passions, domestic affections, but friendship is, strictly speaking, none of the three. It is — to borrow the phrase so misused by that arch *im*-moralist, that high-priest of intellectual self-worship, Goethe — an elective affinity, based upon the spiritual consanguinity, which, though frequently co-existent with, is different from any tie of instinct or blood-relationship. Therefore, neither the sanctities nor weaknesses of these rightly appertain to it; its duties, immunities, benefits and pains, belong to a distinct sphere, of which the vital atmosphere is perfect liberty. A bond, not of nature but of choice, it should exist and be maintained calm, free, and clear, having neither rights nor jealousies; at once the firmest and most independent of all human ties.

"Enough," said Rasselas to Imlac; "you convince me that no man can ever be a poet." And truly, *reviewing friendship* in its purest essence, one is prone

to think that, in this imperfect world of ours, no man — certainly no woman — ever can be a *friend.* And yet we all own some dozens; from Mrs. Granville Jones, who invites "a few friends" — say two hundred — to pass with her a "social evening" — to the poor costermonger, who shouts after the little pugilistic sweep the familiar tragico-comic saying: "Hit him hard; he's got no friends!" And who that is not an utter misanthrope would refuse to those of his or her acquaintance that persist in claiming it, the kindly title, and the pleasant social charities which belong thereto?

"Love is sweet,
Given or returned;"

and so is friendship; when, be it ever so infinitesimal in quantity, its quality is unadulterated springing, as, I repeat, women's friendship almost always does spring, out of that one-idea'd impulsiveness, often wrong-headed, but rarely evil-hearted, which makes us at once so charming and so troublesome, and which, I fear, never will be got out of us till we cease to be women, and become what men sometimes call us — and they well know they give us but too much need to be — angels.

Yes, with all our folly, we are not false; not even

when Lavinia Smith adores with all her innocent soul the condescending Celestina Jones, though meeting twenty years after as fat Mrs. Brown and vulgar Mrs. Green, they may with difficulty remember one another's Christian names: not when Bessy Thompson, blessed with three particularly nice brothers, owns likewise three times three "dearest" friends, who honestly persuade themselves and her that they come only to see dear Bessy; nevertheless, the fondness is real enough to outlast many bothers caused by said brothers, or even a cantankerous sister-in-law to end with. Nay, when Miss Hopkins, that middle-aged and strong-minded "young lady" of blighted affections, and Mrs. Jenkins, that woman of sublime aspirations, who has unluckily "mated with a clown," coalesce against the opposite sex, fall into one another's arms and vow eternal friendship — for a year; after which, for five more, they make all their acquaintances uncomfortable by their eternal enmity — even in this lamentable phase of the sentiment, it is more respectable than the time-serving, place-hunting, dinner-seeking devotion which Messrs. Tape and Tadpole choose to denominate "friendship."

Men may laugh at us, and we deserve it: we are

often egregious fools, but we are honest fools; and our folly, at least in this matter, usually ends where theirs begins — with middle life, or marriage.

It is the unmarried, the solitary, who are most prone to that sort of "sentimental" friendship with their own or the opposite sex, which, though often most noble, unselfish, and true, is in some forms ludicrous, in others dangerous. For two women, past earliest girlhood, to be completely absorbed in one another, and make public demonstration of the fact, by caresses or quarrels, is so repugnant to common sense, that where it ceases to be silly it becomes actually wrong. But to see two women, whom Providence has denied nearer ties, by a wise substitution making the best of fate, loving, sustaining, and comforting one another, with a tenderness often closer than that of sisters, because it has all the novelty of election which belongs to the conjugal tie itself — this, I say, is an honourable and lovely sight.

Not less so the friendship — rare, I grant, yet quite possible — which subsists between a man and woman whom circumstances, or their own idiosyncrasies, preclude from the slightest chance of ever "falling in love." That such friendships can exist, especially

between persons of a certain temperament and order of mind, and remain for a lifetime, utterly pure, interfering with no rights, and transgressing no law of morals or society, most people's observation of life will testify; and he must take a very low view of human nature who dares to say that these attachments, satirically termed "Platonic," are impossible. But, at the same time, common sense must allow that they are rare to find, and not the happiest always, when found; because in some degree they are contrary to nature. Nature's law undoubtedly is, that our nearest ties should be those of blood — father or brother, sister or mother — until comes the closer one of marriage; and it is always, if not wrong, rather pitiful, when any extraneous bond comes in between to forestall the entire affection that a young man ought to bring to his future wife, a young woman to her husband. I say *ought* — God knows if they ever do! But, however fate, or folly, or wickedness may interfere to prevent it, not the less true is the undoubted fact, that happy above all must be that marriage where neither husband nor wife ever had a friend so dear as one another.

After marriage, for either party to have or to desire a dearer or closer friend than the other, is a state of

things so inconceivably deplorable — the more erring, the more deplorable — that it will not bear discussion. Such cases there are; but He who in the mystery of marriage prefigured a greater mystery still, alone can judge them, for He only knows their miseries, their temptations, and their wrongs.

While allowing that a treaty of friendship, "pure and simple," can exist between a man and woman — under peculiar circumstances, even between a young man and a young woman — it must also be allowed that the experiment is difficult, often dangerous; so dangerous, that the matter-of-fact half of the world will not believe in it at all. Parents and guardians very naturally object to a gentleman's "hanging up his hat" in their houses, or taking sentimental twilight rambles with their fair young daughters. They insist, and justly, that he ought to

"Come with a good will, or come not at all;"

namely as a mere acquaintance, a pleasant friend of the family — the *whole* family, or as a declared suitor. And though this may fall rather hard upon the young man, who has just a hundred a-year, and, with every disposition towards flirting, a strong horror of matrimony — still, it is wisest and best. It may save both

parties from frittering away, in a score of false sentimental likings, the love that ought to belong but to one; or, still worse, from committing or suffering what, beginning blamelessly on either side, frequently ends in incurable pain, irremediable wrong.

Therefore it is, generally speaking, those further on in life, with whom the love-phase is past, or for whom it never existed, who may best use the right, which every pure and independent heart undoubtedly has, of saying: "I take this man or woman for my friend: only a friend — never either more or less — whom as such I mean to keep to the end of my days." And if more of these, who really know what friendship is, would have the moral courage to assert its dignity against the sneers of society, which is loath to believe in anything higher and purer than itself, I think it would be all the better for the world.

Women's friendships with one another are of course free from all these perils, and yet they have their own. The wonderful law of sex — which exists spiritually as well as materially, and often independent of matter altogether; since we see many a man who is much more of a woman, and many a woman who would certainly be the "better-half" of any man who cared

for her — this law can rarely be withstood with impunity. In most friends whose attachment is specially deep and lasting, we can usually trace a difference — of strong or weak, gay or grave, brilliant or solid — answering in some measure to the difference of sex. Otherwise, a close, all-engrossing friendship between two women would seldom last long; or if it did, by their mutual feminine weaknesses acting and reacting upon one another, would most likely narrow the sympathies and deteriorate the character of both.

Herein lies the distinction — marked and inalienable — between friendship and love. The latter, being a natural necessity, requires but *the one*, whom it absorbs and assimilates till the two diverse, and often opposite characters, become a safe unity — according to divine ordinance, "one flesh." But friendship, to be friendship at all, must have an independent self-existence, capable of gradations and varieties; for though we can have but one dearest friend, it would argue small power of either appreciating or loving to have only one friend.

On the other hand, the "hare with many friends" has passed into a proverb. Such a condition is manifestly impossible. The gentleman who, in answer to

his servant's request to be allowed to go and "see a friend," cries: —

> "Fetch me my coat, John! Though the night be raw,
> I'll see him too — the first I ever saw:"

this cynic, poor wretch! speaks wiser than he is aware of. One simple fact explains and limits the whole question — that those only can find true friends who have in themselves the will and capacity to be such.

A *friend.* Not perhaps until later life, until the follies, passions, and selfishnesses of youth have died out, do we — I mean especially we women — recognise the inestimable blessing, the responsibility awful as sweet, of possessing or of being a friend. And though, not willing to run counter to the world's kindly custom, we may give that solemn title to many who do not exactly own it; though year by year the fierce experience of life, through death, circumstance, or change, narrows the circle of those who do own it; still that man or woman must have been very unfortunate — perhaps, as there can be no result without a cause, worse than unfortunate — who, looking back on thirty, forty, or fifty years of existence, cannot say from the heart, "I thank God for my friends."

People rarely long keep what they do not deserve.

If you find any who, in the decline of life, have few "auld acquaintance," and those few "never brought to mind," but in their stead a lengthy list of friends who are such no more, who have "ill-treated" them, or with whom they have had a "slight coolness;" if they are always finding fault with the friends they now have, and accusing them of ingratitude or neglect; if they tell you these friends' secrets, and expect you in return to tell them all *your* friends' secrets, and your own — beware of these people! They may have many good qualities; you may like them very much, and keep them as most pleasant society; but as for resting your heart upon them, you might as well rest it upon a burning rock or a broken reed.

But if you find people who through all life's vicissitudes and pangs have preserved a handful of real "friends" — exclusive of you, for it takes years to judge the value of friendship towards ourselves — if on the whole they complain little either of these friends or of the world, which rarely misuses a good man or woman for ever; if they bestow no extravagant devotion on you, nor expect from you one whit more than you freely give; if they never, under any excuse, however personally flattering, talk to you about a third

party, as you would shrink from their talking to any third party about you — then, be satisfied;

> "Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried;
> Grapple them to thy soul with hooks of steel!"

Never let them go; suffer no changing tide of fortune to sweep them from you — no later friendships to usurp their place. Be very patient with them; bear their little faults as they must bear yours; make allowance for the countless unintentional slights, neglects, or offences, that we all in the whirl of life must both endure and commit towards those who form not a part, but an adjunct of our existence — remembering, as I said before, that the very element in which true friendship lives, and out of which it cannot live at all, is perfect *liberty*.

Friendship once conceived should, like love, in one sense last for ever. That it does not; that in the world's harsh wear and tear many a very sincere attachment is slowly obliterated, or both parties grow out of it and cast it, like a snake his last year's skin — though that implies something of the snake-nature, I fear — are facts too mournfully common to be denied. But there is a third fact, as mournfully *un*common, which needs *to be remembered* likewise: we may lose the friend —

the friendship we never can or ought to lose. Actively, it may exist no more; but passively, it is just as binding as the first moment when we pledged it, as we believed, for ever. Its duties, like its delights, may have become a dead-letter; but none of its claims or confidences have we ever afterwards the smallest right to abjure or to break.

And here is one accusation which I must sorrowfully bring against women, as being much more guilty than men. We can keep a secret — ay, against all satire, I protest we can — while the confider remains our friend; but if that tie ceases, pop! out it comes! and in the bitterness of invective, the pang of wounded feeling, or afterwards in mere thoughtlessness, and easy forgetting of what is so easily healed, a thousand things are said and done for which nothing can ever atone. The lost friendship, which, once certain that it is past all revival, ought to be buried as solemnly and silently as a lost love, is cast out into the open street for all the snarling curs of society to gnaw at and mangle, and all the contemptuous misogynists who pass by to point the finger at — "See what your grand ideals all come to!"

Good women — dear my sisters! be our friendships

false or true, wise or foolish, living or dead — let us at least learn to keep them sacred! Men are far better than we in this. Rarely will a man voluntarily or thoughtlessly betray a friend's confidence, either at the time or afterwards. He will say, even to his own wife: "I can't tell you this — I have no right to tell you:" and if she has the least spark of good feeling, she will honour and love him all the dearer for so saying. More rarely still will a man be heard, as women constantly are, speaking ill of some friend who a little while before, while the friendship lasted, was all perfection. What is necessary to be said he will say, but not a syllable more, leaving all the rest in that safe, still atmosphere, where all good fructifies and evil perishes — the atmosphere of silence.

Ay, above all things, what women need to learn in their friendships is the sanctity of silence — silence in outward demonstration, silence under wrong, silence with regard to the outside world, and often a delicate silence between one another. About the greatest virtue a friend can have, is to be able to hold her tongue; and though this, like all virtues carried to extremity, may grow into a fault, and do great harm, still, it never can do so much harm as that horrible laxity and

profligacy of speech which is at the root of half the quarrels, cruelties, and injustices of the world.

And let every woman, old or young, in commencing a friendship, be careful that it is to the right thing she has given the right name. If so, let her enter upon it thoughtfully, earnestly, advisedly, as upon an engagement made for life, which in truth it is; since, whether its duration be brief or long, it is a tangible reality, and, as such, must have its influence on the total chronicle of existence, wherein no line can ever be quite blotted out. Let her, with the strength and comfort of it, prepare to take the burden; determined, whatever the other may do, to fulfil her own part, and act up to her own duty, absolutely and conscientiously, to the end. For truly, the greatest of all external blessings is it to be able to lean your heart against another heart, faithful, tender, true, and tried, and record with a thankfulness that years deepen instead of diminishing, "I have got a friend!"

CHAPTER VIII.

Gossip.

One of the wisest and best among our English ethical writers, the author of *Companions of my Solitude*, says, *àpropos* of gossip, that one half of the evil-speaking of the world arises, not from *malice prepense*, but from mere want of amusement. And I think we may even grant that in the other half, constituted small of mind or selfish in disposition, it is seldom worse than the natural falling back from large abstract interests, which they cannot understand, upon those which they can — alas! only the narrow, commonplace, and personal.

Yet they mean no harm; are often under the delusion that they both mean and do a great deal of good, take a benevolent watch over their fellow-creatures, and so forth. They would not say an untrue word, or do an unkind action — not they! The most barefaced slanderer always tells her story with a good motive, or thinks she does; begins with a harmless

"bit of gossip," just to pass the time away — the time which hangs so heavy! and ends by becoming the most arrant and mischievous tale-bearer under the sun.

Ex. gratiâ — Let me put on record the decline and fall, voluntarily confessed, of two friends of mine, certainly the last persons likely to take to tittle-tattle; being neither young nor elderly; on the whole, perhaps rather "bright" than stupid; having plenty to do and to think of — too much, indeed, since they came on an enforced holiday out of that vortex in which London whirls her professional classes round and round, year by year, till at last often nothing but a handful of dry bones is cast on shore. They came to lodge at the village of X—, let me call it, as being an "unknown quantity," which the reader will vainly attempt to find out, since it is just like some hundred other villages — has its church and rector, great house and squire, doctor and lawyer (alas! poor village, I fear its *two* doctors and *two* lawyers); also its small select society, where everybody knows everybody — that is, their affairs: for themselves, one half the parish resolutely declines "knowing" the other half — sometimes pretermittently, sometimes permanently. Of course, not

a single soul would have ventured to know Bob and Maria — as I shall call the strangers — had they not brought an introduction to one family, under the shelter of whose respectability they meekly placed their own. A very worthy family it was, which showed them all hospitality, asked them to tea continually, and there, in the shadow of the pleasant drawing-room, which overlooked the street, indoctrinated them into all the mysteries of X—, something in this wise:

"Dear me! there's Mrs. Smith; she has on that identical yellow bonnet which has been so long in Miss Miffin's shop-window. Got it cheap, no doubt: Mr. Smith does keep the poor thing *so* close! Annabella, child, make haste; just tell me whether that isn't the same young man who called on the Joneses three times last week! Red whiskers and moustaches. One of those horrid officers, no doubt. My dear Miss Maria, I never do like to say a word against my neighbours; but before I would let my Annabella go about like the Jones's girls . . . . Bless my life! there's that cab at the corner house again — and her husband out! Well, if I ever could have believed it, even of silly, flirty Mrs. Green! whom people do say old Mr. Green mar*ried out of a* London hosier's, where he went in to buy

a pair of gloves. What a shocking place London must be . . . .! But I beg your pardon, my dear . . . ." And so on, and so on.

This, slightly varied, was the stock conversation, which seemed amply sufficient to fill the minds and hours of the whole family, and, indeed, of every family at X—.

Maria and Bob used to go home laughing, and thanking their stars that they *did* live in that shocking place London. Bob made harmless jokes at the expense of the unconscious household who,

"Pinnacled dim in the intense inane,"

could drop down, hawk-like, upon reputations, bonnets, and beaus. Maria gave vent to a majestic but indignant pity; and both hugged themselves in the belief that never, under any circumstances, could *they* sink to such a dead-level of folly, vacuity, spite.

Weeks passed — rather slowly, especially when, of autumn evenings, they found themselves *minus* books, piano, theatre, concerts, society — in fact, in precisely the position of the inhabitants of X— all year round. So, as daylight was less dull than candle-light, they used to rise at unearthly hours; dine — shall I betray the Goths? — at 11.30 A.M., take tea at 4 P.M., and go to

bed as soon after dark as they could for shame. At last, from very dulness, Maria got into the habit of sitting at the window and telling Bob what was passing in the street, interspersed with little illustrative anecdotes she had caught up, "just as bits of human nature." One, the stock scandal of the place, interested them both so much, that they watched for the heroine's carriage every day for a week; and when at last Maria cried, "There it is!" Bob jumped up with all the eagerness of Annabella herself, and missing the sight, retired grumbling: "What nonsense! I declare you're getting just as bad a gossip as anybody here!" (*N.B.* — The masculine mind, in accusative form, always prefers the second person of the verb.)

"Well," observed Maria, "shall I give up telling you any news I happen to hear?"

"Oh, no! You may tell what you like. As the man said when his wife beat him — it amuses you, and it doesn't harm me."

Finally — I have it from Maria's own confession — coming in one afternoon absorbed in cogitations as to what possible motive Mrs. Green could have in telling Mrs. Elizabeth Jones she wished to call on her, *Maria; and what* on earth would be done if Annabella,

whose mamma wouldn't allow her even to bow to Mrs. Green, should happen to call at the same time — she was quite startled by Bob's springing up from the sofa to meet her, with an air of great relief.

"So you're back at last! Well, who did you see, and what did they say to you? Do sit down, and let's hear all the gossip going."

"Gossip!" And meeting one another's eyes, they both burst into a hearty fit of laughter, declaring they never again would pride themselves on being a bit better than their neighbours.

Ay, fatal and vile as her progeny may be, "the mother of mischief," says the proverb, "is no bigger than a midge's wing." Nay, as many a vice can be traced back to an exaggerated virtue, this hateful propensity to tittle-tattle springs from the same peculiarity which rightly guided, constitutes womanhood's chiefest strength and charm; blesses many a worthless man with a poor, fond, faithful wife, who loves him for nothing that he is or does, but merely because he is *himself;* forgives to many a scapegrace son or brother a hundred sins, and follows him to the grave or the scaffold, blind to everything except the fact that he is her own. Personal interests, personal attachments, personal pre-

judices, are, whether we own it or not, the ruling bias of us women: it is better to own it at once, govern, correct, and modify it, than to deny it in name, and betray it in every circumstance of our lives.

Men, whose habits of thought and action are at once more selfish and less personal than ours, are very seldom given to gossiping. They will take a vast interest in the misgovernment of India, or the ill-cooking of their own dinners; but any topic betwixt these two — such as the mismanagement of their neighbour's house, or the extravagance of their partner's wife — is a matter of very minor importance. They "canna be fashed" with trifles that don't immediately concern themselves. It is the women — always the women — who poke about with undefended farthing candles in the choke-damp passages of this dangerous world; who put their feeble ignorant hands to the Archimedean lever that, slight as it seems, can shake society to its lowest foundations. For, though it irks me to wound with strong language the delicate sensibilities of my silver-tongued sisters, I would just remind them of what they may hear, certainly one Sunday in the year, concerning that same dainty little member, which is said to be "a fire, *a world of iniquity* ... and it is set on *fire of hell.*"

Verily, the "Silent Woman" — a lady without a head, who officiates as sign to many a country inn — had need to be so depicted. But it is not "the gift of the gab," the habit of using a dozen words where one would answer the purpose, which may arise from want of education, nervousness, or surplus but honest energy and earnest feeling — it is not that which does the harm; it is the lamentable fact, that whether from a superabundance of the imaginative faculty, carelessness of phrase, or a readiness to jump at conclusions, and represent facts not as they are but as they appear to the representers, very few women are absolutely and invariably veracious. Men lie wilfully, deliberately, on principle, as it were; but women quite involuntarily. Nay, they would start with horror from the bare thought of such a thing. They love truth in their hearts, and yet — and yet — they are constantly giving to things a slight colouring cast by their own individuality; twisting facts a little, a very little, according as their tastes, affections, or convenience indicate: never perhaps telling a direct lie, but merely a deformed or prevaricated truth.

And this makes the fatal danger of gossip. If all people spoke the absolute truth about their neighbours,

or held their tongues, which is always a possible alternative, it would not so much matter. At the worst, there would be a few periodical social thunder-storms, and then the air would be clear. But the generality of people do *not* speak the truth: they speak what they see, or think, or believe, or wish. Few observant characters can have lived long in the world without learning to receive every fact communicated second-hand *with reservations* — reservations that do not necessarily stamp the communicator as a liar, but merely make allowance for certain inevitable variations, like the variations of the compass, which every circumnavigator must calculate upon as a natural necessity.

Thus, Miss A., in the weary small-talk of a morning call, not quite knowing what she says, or glad to say anything for the sake of talking, lets drop to Mrs. B. that she heard Mrs. C. say: "She would take care to keep her boys out of the way of the little B's" — a very harmless remark, since, when it was uttered, the little B's were just recovering from the measles. But Miss A., an absent sort of woman, repeats it three months afterwards, forgetting all about the measles; indeed, she has persuaded herself that it referred to the rudeness of the B. lads, who are her own private terror,

and she thinks it may probably do some good to give their over-indulgent mamma a hint on the subject. Mrs. B., too well-bred to reply more than "Indeed!" is yet mortally offended; declines the next dinner-party at the C's, and confides her private reason for doing so to Miss D., a good-natured chatterbox, who, with the laudable intention of getting to the bottom of the matter, and reconciling the belligerents, immediately communicates the same. "What have I done?" exclaims the hapless Mrs. C. "I never said any such thing!" "Oh, but Miss A. protests she *heard* you say it." Again Mrs. C. warmly denies; which denial goes back directly to Miss A. and Mrs. B., imparting to both them and Miss D. a very unpleasant feeling as to the lady's veracity. A few days after, thinking it over, she suddenly recollects that she really did say the identical words, with reference solely to the measles; bursts into a hearty fit of laughter, and congratulates herself that it is all right. But not so: the mountain cannot so quickly shrink into its original mole-hill. Mrs. B., whose weak point is her children, receives the explanation with considerable dignity and reserve; is "sorry that Mrs. C. should have troubled herself about such a trifle;" shakes hands, and

professes herself quite satisfied. Nevertheless, in her own inmost mind she thinks — and her countenance shows it — "I believe you said it, for all that." A slight coolness ensues, which everybody notices, discusses, and gives a separate version of; all which versions somehow or other come to the ears of the parties concerned, who, without clearly knowing why, feel vexed and aggrieved each at the other. The end of it all is a total estrangement.

Is not a little episode like this at the root of nearly all the family feuds, lost friendships, "cut" acquaintanceships, so pitifully rife in the world? Rarely any great matter, a point of principle or a violated pledge, an act of justice or dishonesty; it is almost always some petty action misinterpreted, some idle word repeated — or a succession of both these, gathering and gathering like the shingle on a sea-beach, something fresh being left behind by every day's tide. Not the men's doing — the fathers, husbands, or brothers, who have no time to bother themselves about such trifles, and who, if they see fit to quarrel over their two grand *causæ belli*, religion and politics, generally do it outright, and either abuse one another like pickpockets in newspaper columns,

or, in revenge for any moral poaching on one another's property, take a horsewhip or a pair of pistols and so end the matter.

No. It is the women who are at the bottom of it all, who, in the narrowness or blankness of their daily lives, are glad to catch at any straw of interest — especially the unmarried, the idle, the rich, and the childless. As says the author I have before referred to: "People not otherwise ill-natured are pleased with the misfortunes of their neighbours, solely because it gives them something to think about, something to talk about. They imagine how the principal actors and sufferers will bear it; what they will do; how they will look; and so the dull bystander forms a sort of drama for himself."

And what a drama! Such a petty plot — such small heroes and heroines — such a harmless villain! When we think of the contemptible nothings that form the daily scandal-dish of most villages, towns, cities, or communities, and then look up at the starry heaven which overshines them all, dropping its rain upon the just and the unjust — or look abroad on the world, of whose wide interests, miseries, joys, duties, they form such an infinitesimal part, one is tempted to blush for

one's species. Strange, that while hundreds and thousands in this Britain have not a crust to eat, Mrs. E. should become the town's talk for three days, because, owing a dinner-party to the F's, G's, H's, and J's, she clears accounts at a cheaper rate by giving a general tea-party instead. "So mean! and with Mr. E.'s large income, too!" — That while millions are living and dying without God in the world, despising Him, forgetting Him, or never having even heard His name, Miss K., a really exemplary woman, should not only refuse, even for charitable purposes, to associate with the L's, an equally irreproachable family, as to morals and benevolence, but should actually forbid her district poor to receive their teaching or their Bibles, because they refuse to add thereto the Church of England Catechism. As to visiting them — "Quite impossible; they are Dissenters, you know."

The gossip of opposing religionism — I will not even call it religion, though religion itself is often very far from pure "godliness" — is at once the most virulent and the saddest phase of the disease; and our sex, it must be confessed, are the more liable to it, especially in the provinces. There, the parish curate may at *times be seen* walking with the Unitarian or Independ-

ent minister, if they happen to be well-educated young men of a social turn; even the rector, worthy man! will occasionally have the sense to join with other worthy men of every denomination in matters of local improvement. But oh! the talk that this gives rise to among the female population! till the reverend objects of it, who in their daily duties have usually more to do with women than with men — another involuntary tribute to those virtues which form the bright underside of every fault that can be alleged against us — are often driven to give in to the force of public opinion, to that incessant babble of silvery waters which wears through the rockiest soil.

The next grand source of gossip — and this, too, curiously indicates how true must be the instinct of womanhood, even in its lowest forms so evidently a corruption from the highest — is love, and with or without that preliminary, matrimony. What on earth should we do if we had no matches to make, or mar; no "unfortunate attachments" to shake our heads over; no flirtations to speculate about and comment upon with knowing smiles; no engagements "on" or "off" to speak our minds about, nosing out every little circumstance, and ferreting our game to their very hole, as if

all their affairs, their hopes, trials, faults, or wrongs, were being transacted for our own private and peculiar entertainment! Of all forms of gossip — I speak of mere gossip, as distinguished from the carrion-crow and dunghill-fly system of scandal-mongering — this tittle-tattle about love-affairs is the most general, the most odious, and the most dangerous.

Every one of us must have known within our own experience many an instance of dawning loves checked, unhappy loves made cruelly public, happy loves embittered, warm, honest loves turned cold, by this horrible system of gossiping about young or unmarried people — "evening" to one another folk who have not the slightest mutual inclination, or if they had, such an idea put into their heads would effectually smother it; setting down every harmless free liking as "a case," or "a flirtation;" and if anything "serious" does turn up, pouncing on it, hunting it down, and never letting it go till dismembered and ground to the bone. Should it ever come to a marriage — and the wonder is, considering all these things, that any love-affair ever does come to that climax at all, or that any honest-hearted, delicate-minded young people, ever have the courage *to indulge the* world by an open attachment or engage-

ment — heavens and earth! how it is talked about! How one learns every single item of what "he" said and "she" said, and what all the relations said, and how it came about, and how it never would have come about at all but for So-and so, and what they have to live upon, and how capable or incapable they are of living upon it, and how very much better both parties would have done if they had only each left the choosing of the other to about four-and-twenty anxious friends, all of which were quite certain the affianced pair never would suit one another, but would have exactly suited somebody else, &c. &c., *ad libitum* and *ad infinitum*.

Many women, otherwise kindly and generous, have in this matter no more consideration towards their own sex or the other, no more sense of the sanctity and silence due to the relation between them, than if the divinely instituted bond of marriage were no higher or purer than the natural instincts of the beasts that perish. It is most sad, nay, it is sickening, to see the way in which, from the age of fourteen upwards, a young woman, on this one subject of her possible or probable matrimonial arrangements, is quizzed, talked over, commented upon, advised, condoled with, lectured, interrogated — until, if she has happily never had

cause to blush for herself, not a week passes that she does not blush for her sex, out of utter contempt, disgust, and indignation.

Surely all right-minded women ought to set their faces resolutely against this desecration of feelings, to maintain the sanctity of which is the only preservative of our influence — that is, our rightful and holy influence, over men. Not that, after the school of Mesdames Barbauld, Hannah More, and other excellent but exceedingly prosy personages, love should be exorcised out of young women's lives and conversations — query, *if* possible? — but let it be treated of delicately, earnestly, rationally, as a matter which, if they have any business with it at all, is undoubtedly the most serious business of their lives. There can be — there ought to be — no medium course; a love-affair is either sober earnest or contemptible folly, if not wickedness: to gossip about it is, in the first instance, intrusive, unkind, or dangerous; in the second, simply silly. Practical people may choose between the two alternatives.

Gossip, public, private, social — to fight against it either by word or pen seems, after all, like fighting with shadows. Everybody laughs at it, protests against

it, blames and despises it; yet everybody does it, or at least encourages others in it: quite innocently, unconsciously, in such a small, harmless fashion — yet, we do it. We must talk about something, and it is not all of us who can find a rational topic of conversation, or discuss it when found. Many, too, who in their hearts hate the very thought of tattle and tale-bearing, are shy of lifting up their voices against it, lest they should be ridiculed for Quixotism, or thought to set themselves up as more virtuous than their neighbours. Others, like our lamented friends, Maria and Bob, from mere idleness and indifference, long kept hovering over the unclean stream, at last drop into it, and are drifted away by it. Where does it land them? Ay, where?

If I, or any one, were to unfold on this subject only our own experience and observation — not a tittle more — what a volume it would make!

Families set by the ears, parents against children, brothers against brothers — not to mention brothers and sisters-in-law, who seem generally to assume, with the legal title, the legal right of interminably squabbling. Friendships sundered, betrothals broken, marriages annulled — in the spirit, at least, while in the letter

kept outwardly, to be a daily torment, temptation, and despair. Acquaintances that would otherwise have maintained a safe and not unkindly indifference, forced into absolute dislike — originating how they know not; but there it is. Old companions, that would have borne each other's little foibles, have forgiven and forgotten little annoyances, and kept up an honest affection till death, driven at last into open rupture, or frozen into a coldness more hopeless still, which no after-warmth will ever have power to thaw.

Truly, from the smallest Little Peddlington that carries on, year by year, its bloodless wars, its harmless scandals, its daily chronicle of interminable nothings, to the great metropolitan world, fashionable, intellectual, noble, or royal, the blight and curse of civilised life is gossip.

How is it to be removed? How are scores of well-meaning women, who in their hearts really like and respect one another — who, did trouble come to any one of them, would be ready with countless mutual kindnesses, small and great, and among whom the sudden advent of death would subdue every idle tongue to honest praise, and silence, at once and for ever, every *bitter word against* the neighbour departed — how are

they to be taught to be every day as generous, considerate, liberal-minded — in short, womanly, as they would assuredly be in any exceptionable day of adversity? How are they to be made to feel the littleness, the ineffably pitiful littleness, of raking up and criticising every slight peculiarity of manner, habits, temper, character, word, action, motive — household, children, servants, living, furniture, and dress, thus constituting themselves the amateur rag-pickers, *chiffonnières* — I was going to say, scavengers, but they do *not* leave the streets clean — of all the blind alleys and foul by-ways of society; while the whole world lies free and open before them, to do their work and choose their innocent pleasure therein — this busy, bright, beautiful world?

Such a revolution is, I doubt, quite hopeless on this side Paradise. But every woman has it in her power personally to withstand the spread of this great plague of tongues, since it lies within her own volition what she will do with her own.

"All the king's horses and all the king's men"

cannot make us either use or bridle that little member. It is our never-failing weapon, double-edged, delicate,

bright, keen; a weapon not necessarily either lethal or vile, but taking its character solely from the manner in which we use it.

First, let every one of us cultivate, in every word that issues from her mouth, absolute truth. I say cultivate, because to very few people — as may be noticed of most young children — does truth, this rigid, literal veracity, come by nature. To many, even who love it and prize it dearly in others, it comes only after the self-control, watchfulness, and bitter experience of years. Let no one conscious of needing this care be afraid to begin it from the very beginning; or in her daily life and conversation fear to confess: "Stay, I said a little more than I meant" — "I think I was not quite correct about such a thing" — "Thus it was; at least, thus it seemed to me personally," &c. &c. Even in the simplest, most everyday statements, we cannot be too guarded or too exact. The "hundred cats" that the little lad saw "fighting on our back-wall," and which afterwards dwindled down to "our cat and another," is a case in point, not near so foolish as it seems.

"Believe only half of what you see, and nothing *that you hear,*" is a cynical saying, and yet less bitter

than at first appears. It does not argue that human nature is false, but simply that it is human nature. How can any fallible human being with two eyes, two ears, one judgment, and one brain — all more or less limited in their apprehensions of things external, and biased by a thousand internal impressions, purely individual — how can we possibly decide on even the plainest actions of another, to say nothing of the words, which may have gone through half-a-dozen different translations and modifications, or the motives, which can only be known to the Omniscient Himself?

In His name, therefore, let us "judge not, that we be not judged." Let us be "quick to hear, slow to speak;" slowest of all to speak any evil, or to listen to it, about anybody. The good we need be less careful over; we are not likely ever to hear too much of that.

"But," say some — very excellent people, too — "are we never to open our mouths? — never to mention the ill things we see or hear; never to stand up for the right, by proclaiming, or by warning and testifying against the wrong?"

Against wrong — in the abstract, yes: but against individuals — doubtful. All the gossip in the world,

or the dread of it, will never turn one domestic tyrant into a decent husband or father; one light woman into a matron leal and wise. Do your neighbour good by all means in your power, moral as well as physical — by kindness, by patience, by unflinching resistance against every outward evil — by the silent preaching of your own contrary life. But if the only good you can do him is by talking at him or about him — nay, even *to* him, if it be in a self-satisfied, super-virtuous, style — such as I earnestly hope the present writer is not doing — you had much better leave him alone. If he be foolish, soon or late he will reap the fruit of his folly; if wicked, be sure his sin will find him out. If he has wronged you, you will neither lessen the wrong nor increase his repentance by parading it. And if — since there are two sides to every subject, and it takes two to make a quarrel — you have wronged him, surely you will not right him or yourself by abusing him. In Heaven's name, let him alone.

CHAPTER IX.

Women of the World.

THE world! It is a word capable of as diverse interpretations or misinterpretations as the thing itself — a thing by various people supposed to belong to heaven, man, or the devil, or alternately to all three. But this is not the place to argue the pros and cons of that doctrinal theology which views as totally evil the same world which its Creator pronounced to be "very good," the same world in and for which its Redeemer lived as well as died; nor, taking it at its present worst, a sinful, miserable, mysterious, yet neither wholly comfortless, hopeless, nor godless world, shall I refer further to that strange Manichæanism which believes that anything earth possesses of good can have sprung from any other source than the All-good, that any happiness in it could exist for a moment, unless derived from Infinite Perfection.

"A woman of the world" — "Quite a woman of the world" — "A mere woman of the world" — with

how many modifications of tone and emphasis do we hear the phrase; which seems inherently to imply a contradiction. Nature herself has apparently decided for women, physically as well as mentally, that their natural destiny should be *not* of the world. In the earlier ages of Judaism and Islamism, nobody ever seems to have ventured a doubt of this. Christianity alone raised the woman to her rightful and original place, as man's one help-meet, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, his equal in all points of vital moment, yet made suited to him by an harmonious something which is less inferiority than difference. And this difference will for ever exist. Volumes written on female progress; speeches interminable, delivered from the public rostrum in female treble, which from that very publicity and bravado would convert the most obvious "rights" into something very like a wrong; biographies numberless of great women — ay, and good — who, stepping out of their natural sphere, have done service in courts, camps, or diplomatic bureaus: all these exceptional cases will never set aside the universal law, that woman's proper place is home. Not merely

"To suckle fools and chronicle small-beer,"

— Shakspeare, who knew us well, would never have made any but an *Iago* say so — but to go hand-in-hand with man on their distinct yet parallel roads, to be within-doors what he has to be in the world without — sole influence and authority in the limited monarchy of home.

Thus, to be a "woman of the world," though not essentially a criminal accusation, implies a state of being not natural, and therefore not happy. Without any sentimental heroics against the hollowness of such an existence, and putting aside the religious view of it altogether, I believe most people will admit that no woman living entirely in and for the world ever was, ever could be, a happy woman; that is, according to the definition of happiness, which supposes it to consist in having our highest faculties most highly developed, and in use to their fullest extent. Any other sort of happiness, either dependent on externally favourable circumstances, or resting on safe negations of ill, we must be considered to possess in common with the oyster; indeed, that easy-tempered and steadfast mollusk, if not "in love," probably has it in much greater perfection than we.

Starting with the proposition that a woman of the

world is not a happy woman; that if she had been most likely she never would have become what she is — I do not think it necessary to nail her up, poor painted jay, as a "shocking example" over Society's barn-door, around which strut and crow a great many fowls quite as mean and not half so attractive. For she is very charming in her way — that is, the principal and best type of her class; she wears *à merveille* that beautiful mask said to be "the homage paid by vice to virtue." And since the successful imitation of an article argues a certain acquaintance with the original, she may once upon a time have actually believed in many of those things which she now so cleverly impersonates — virtue, heroism, truth, love, friendship, honour, and fidelity. She is like certain stamped-out bronze ornaments, an admirable imitation of real womanhood — till you walk round her to the other side.

The woman of the world is rarely a very young woman. It stands to reason, she could not be. To young people, the world is always a paradise — a fool's paradise, devoutly believed in: it is not till they have found out its shams that they are able to assume *them. By that* time, however, they have ceased to be

fools: it takes a certain amount of undoubted cleverness to make any success, or take any rule in the world.

By the world, I do not mean the aristocratic Vanity-fair — let those preach of it who move up and down or keep stalls therein — but the world of the middle classes; the "society" into which drift the homeless, thoughtless, ambitious, pleasure-loving among them; those who have no purpose in life except to get through it somehow, and those who never had any interest in it except their own beloved selves.

A woman of the sort I write of may in one sense be placed at the lowest deep of womanhood, because her centre of existence is undoubtedly herself. You may trace this before you have been introduced to her five minutes: in the sweet manner which so well simulates a universal benevolence, being exactly the same to everybody — namely, everybody worth knowing; in the air of interest with which she asks a dozen polite or kindly questions, of which she never waits for the answer; in the instinctive consciousness you have that all the while she is talking agreeably to you, or flatteringly listening to your talented conversation, her attention is on the *qui vive* after every body and every

thing throughout the room — that is, everything that concerns herself. As for yourself, from the moment you have passed out of her sight, or ceased to minister to her amusement or convenience, you may be quite certain you will have as completely slipped out of her memory as if you had vanished into another sphere. Her own sphere cannot contain you; for though it seems so large, it has no real existence: it is merely a reflection of so much of the outer world as can be received into the one small drop of not over-clear water, which constitutes this woman's soul.

Yet waste not your wrath upon her — she is as much to be pitied as blamed. Do not grow savage at hearing her, in that softly-pitched voice of hers, talk sentiment by the yard, while you know she snubs horribly in private every unlucky relative she has; whose only hours of quiet are when they joyfully deck her and send her out to adorn society. Do not laugh when she criticises pictures, and goes into raptures over books, which you are morally certain she has never either seen or read; or if she had, from the very character of her mind, could no more understand them than your cat can appreciate Shakspeare. Contemn her not, for her state might not have been always thus;

you know not the causes which produced it; and — stay till you see her end.

There is a class of worldly women which, to my mind, is much worse than this; because their shams are less cleverly sustained, and their ideal of good (for every human being *must* have one — the conqueror his crown, and the sot his gin-bottle) is far lower and more contemptible. The brilliant woman of society has usually her pet philanthropies, her literary, learned, or political penchants, in which the good she thirsts after though unreal, is the imitation of a vital reality; and as such is often, in some degree, useful to others. But this pseudo-woman of the world has no ideal beyond fine dresses, houses, carriages, acquaintances; and even these she does not value for their own sakes, only because they are superior to her neighbour's.

You will find her chiefly among the half-educated *nouveaux riches* of the professional classes, vainly striving to attain to their level — the highest point visible on her horizon. And this is no happy altitude of learning, or intelligence, or refinement; but merely a certain "position" — a place at a dinner-party, or a house in a square.

While the first kind of woman always has a degree

of sway in society, this one is society's most prostrate slave. She dares not furnish her house, choose her servants, eat her food, pay her visits, or even put the gown on her back and the bonnet on her head, save by rule and precedent. She will worry herself and you about the veriest trifles of *convenance* — such as whether it is most genteel to leave one card with the corner turned down, or to expend a separate card upon each member of the family. To find herself at a full-dress soirée in demi-toilette would make this poor lady miserable for a month; and if by any chance you omitted paying her the proper visit of inquiry after an entertainment, she would consider you meant a personal insult, and, if she dared — only she seldom ventures on any decisive proceedings — would cut your acquaintance immediately.

The celebrated Mrs. Grundy keeps her in a state of mortal servitude. Even in London, which to a lady of medium age, established character, and decent behaviour, is the most independent place in the world; where, as I once heard said: "My dear, be assured you are not of the least importance to anybody — may go anywhere, dress anyhow, and, in short, do *anything* you like except stand on your head" — even

here she is for ever pursued by a host of vague adjectives, "proper," "correct," "genteel," which hunt her to death like a pack of rabid hounds.

True, the world, like its master, is by no means so black as it is sometimes painted: it often has a foundation of good sense and right feeling under its most ridiculous and wearisome forms; but this woman sees only the forms, among which she blunders like one of those quack-artists who pretend to draw the human figure without the smallest knowledge of anatomy. Utterly ignorant of the framework on which society moves, she is perpetually straining at gnats and swallowing camels, both in manners and morals. To her, laborious politeness stands in the stead of kindliness; show, of hospitality; etiquette, of decorum. *Les bienséances*, which are only valuable all being the index and offering of a gentle, generous, and benevolent heart, are to this unfortunate woman the brazen altar upon which she immolates her own comfort and that of everybody connected with her.

How often do we hear the phrases, — "What will the world say?" — "Perhaps; but, then, we live in the world." — "A good soul enough, but totally ignorant of the world." — It is worth while pausing a mo-

ment to consider of what this "world" really consists, that women seem at once so eagerly to run after, and to be so terribly afraid of.

Not the moral world, which judges their sins — with, alas, how short-sighted and unevenly balanced a judgment, often! — but the perpetually changing world of custom, which regulates their clothes, furniture, houses, manner of living, sayings, doings, and sufferings. Take it to pieces, and what is it? Nothing but a floating atmosphere of common-place people surrounding certain congeries of people a little less ordinary, the nucleus of which is generally one person decidedly extra-ordinary, who, by force of will, position, intellect, or character, or by some unquestionable magnitude of virtue or vice, stands out distinctly from the average multitude, and rules it according to his or her individual choice. All the rest are, as I said, a mere atmosphere of nobodies; which atmosphere can be cloven any day — one sees it done continually — by a single flesh-and-blood arm: yet in it the woman of the world allows herself to sit and suffocate; dare not dress comfortably, act and speak straightforwardly, live naturally, or sometimes even honestly. For will *she not rather* run in debt for a bonnet, than wear her

old one a year behind the *mode?* give a ball and stint the family dinner for a month after? take a large house, and furnish handsome reception-rooms, while her household huddle together anyhow in untidy attic bedchambers, and her servants swelter on shake-downs beside the kitchen fire? She prefers this a hundred times to stating plainly, by word or manner: "My income is so much a-year — I don't care who knows it — it will not allow me to live beyond a certain rate, it will not keep comfortably both my family and acquaintance; therefore, excuse my preferring the comfort of my family to the entertainment of my acquaintance. And, Society, if you choose to look in upon us, you must just take us as we are, without any pretences of any kind; or you may shut the door, and — good by!"

And Society, in the aggregate, is no fool. It is astonishing what an amount of "eccentricity" it will stand from anybody who takes the bull by the horns, too fearless or too indifferent to think of consequences. How respectfully it will follow a clever woman who is superior to the weakness of washing her hands or combing her hair properly, whose milliner and dressmaker must evidently have lived in the last century,

and who, in her manners and conversation, often breaks through every rule of even the commonest civility! How the same thoroughly respectable set, which would be shocked to let its young daughters take a morning shopping in Regent Street unprotected by a tall footman, will carry them at night to a soirée given by a Lady Somebody, of rather more than doubtful reputation, till some rich marriage, which in its utter lovelessness and hypocrisy may have been, in the sight of Heaven, the foulest of all her sins, in the sight of man obliterated every one of them at once!

Yet this "world" which, when we come to look at it, seems nothing — less than nothing — a chimera that no honest heart need quail at for a moment — is at once the idol and the *bête noire* of a large portion of women-kind during their whole existence. Ay, from the day when baby's first wardrobe must be of the most extravagant description, costing in lace, braiding, and embroidery almost as much as mamma's marriage outfit — which was a deal too fine for her station — when all the while unfortunate baby would be quite as pretty and twice as comfortable in plain muslin and lawn: down to the last day of our subjugation to *fashion*, when we must needs be carried to our per-

manent repose under a proper amount of feathers, and followed by a customary number of mourning coaches — after being coaxed to it — useless luxury! by a satin-lined coffin, stuffed pillow, and ornamented shroud.

In the intermediate stage, marriage, we are worse off still, because the world's iron hand is upon us at a time and under circumstances when we can most keenly feel its grinding weight.

"Do you think," said a young lady once to me, "that Henry and I ought to marry upon less than four hundred a-year?"

"No certainly, my dear; because you marry for so many people's benefit besides your own. How, for instance, could your acquaintance bear to see moreen curtains, instead of the blue-and-silver damask you were talking of! And how could you give those charming little dinner-parties which, you say, are indispensable to one in your position, without three servants, or a boy in buttons as well? Nay, if you went into society at all, of the kind you now keep, a fifth of Henry's annual income would melt away in dresses, bouquets, and white kid-gloves. No, my dear

girl, I can by no means advise *you* to marry upon less than four hundred a-year."

My young friend looked up, a little doubtful if I were in jest or earnest; and Mr. Henry gave vent to an impatient sigh. I thought — "Poor things!" for they were honestly in love, and there was no earthly reason why they should not marry. How many hundreds more are thus wasting the best years of their life, the best hopes of their youth, love, home, usefulness, energy — and God only knows how much besides — and for what? Evening-parties, dresses, and gloves, a fine house, and blue-and-silver curtains!

Yet a woman of the world would have said that this couple were quite right; that if they had married and lived afterwards with the careful prudence that alone would have been possible to a young man of Mr. Henry's independent character, they must infallibly have gone down in society, have dropped out of their natural circle, to begin life — as their parents did, — as most middle-class parents have done, — narrowly and humbly. Though without much fear of positive starvation, they must have given up many luxuries, have had to learn and practise many domestic economies *which probably* never had come into the head of either

the lady or the gentleman; and yet love might have taught them, as it teaches the most ignorant. They would undoubtedly have had to live, for the next few years at least, not for society at large, but for their own two selves and their immediate connexions.

And very likely Henry would have done it, for a young fellow in love will do mightily heroic things; some, especially hard-worked professional men, being weak enough to believe that a snug fire-side, where a cheerful-faced little wife has warmed his slippers and sits pouring out his tea — even if obliged to make sundry intermediate rushes up-stairs to quiet something which obstinately refuses to go to sleep — is preferable to a handsome solitary club-dinner, a wine-and-cigar party, or a ball, at which he revels till 3 A.M. in the smiles of a tarlatane angel, whom he may ask to waltz *ad libitum*, but dare not for his life — or his honour, which is dearer — ask any other question, until he has got grey hairs and a thousand a-year. Dares not, for the worldly fathers, the still more worldly mothers, nay, the young daughters themselves, whose hearts, under their innocent muslins, are slowly hardening into those of premature women of the world, would stand aghast at the idea; "Love in a cottage" — such an out-of-

date, absurdly romantic, preposterous thing! Which it decidedly is — for people who bring to the said cottage the expectations and necessities of Hyde Park Gardens or Belgrave Square.

Yet, on the other hand, it is hardly possible to over-calculate the evils accruing to individuals and to society in general from this custom, gradually increasing, of late and ultra-prudent marriages. Parents bring up their daughters in luxurious homes, expecting and exacting that the home to which they transfer them should be of almost equal ease; forgetting how next to impossible it is for such a home to be offered by any young man of the present generation, who has to work his way like his father before him. Daughters, accustomed to a life of ease and laziness, are early taught to check every tendency towards "a romantic attachment" — the insane folly of loving a man for what he is, rather than for what he has got; of being content to fight the worldly battle hand-in-hand — with a hand that is worth clasping, rather than settle down in comfortable sloth, protected and provided for in all external things. Young men ... But words fail to trace the lot of enforced bachelorhood, hardest when its hardship ceases to be consciously felt. An unmarried woman, if

a good woman, can always make herself happy; find innumerable duties, interests, amusements; live a pure, cheerful, and useful life. So can some men — but very, very few.

Scarcely any sight is more pitiable than a young man who has drifted on to past thirty, without home or near kindred; with just income enough to keep him respectably in the position which he supposes himself bound to maintain, and to supply him with the various small luxuries — such as thirty guineas per annum in cigars, &c. — which have become habitual to him. Like his fellow-mortals, he is liable enough to the unlucky weakness of falling in love, now and then; but he somehow manages to extinguish the passion before it gets fairly alight; knowing he can no more venture to ask a girl in his own sphere to marry him, or be engaged to him, than he can coax the planet Venus out of her golden west into the dirty, gloomy, two-pair-back where his laundress cheats him, and his landlady abuses him: whence, perhaps, he occasionally emerges gloriously, all studs and white necktie — to assist at some young beauty's wedding, where he feels in his heart he might once have been the happy bridegroom — if from his silence she had not been driven to go desperately and

sell herself to the old fool opposite, and is fast becoming, nay, is already become, a fool's clever mate — a mere woman of the world. And he — what a noble ideal he has gained of our sex, from this and other similar experiences! with what truth of emotion will he repeat, as he gives the toast of "The bridemaids," the hackneyed quotation about pain and sorrow wringing the brow, and smile half-adoringly, half-pathetically, at the "ministering angels" who titter around him. They, charming innocents! will doubtless go home avouching "What a delightful person is Mr. So-and-so. I wonder he never gets married." While Mr. So-and-So also goes home, sardonically minded, to his dull lodgings, his book and his cigar, or — he best knows where. And in the slow process of inevitable deterioration, by forty he learns to think matrimony a decided humbug; and hugs himself in the conclusion that a virtuous, high-minded, and disinterested woman, if existing at all, exists as a mere *lusus naturæ* — not to be met with by mortal man now-a-days. Believing his feelings with a grunt — half-sigh, half-sneer — he dresses and goes to the opera — or the *ballet*, at all events — or settles himself on the sofa to a French novel, and ends by firmly *believing us* women to be — what we are painted there!

Good God! — the exclamation is too solemn to be profane — if this state of things be true, and it is true, and I have barely touched the outer surface of its unfathomably horrible truth — what will the next generation come to? What will they be — those unborn millions who are to grow up into our men and our women? The possible result, even in a practical, to say nothing of a moral light, is awful to think upon.

Can it not be averted? Can we not — since, while the power of the world is with men, the influence lies with women — can we not bring up our girls more usefully and less showily — less dependent on luxury and wealth? Can we not teach them from babyhood that to labour is a higher thing than merely to enjoy; that even enjoyment itself is never so sweet as when it has been earned? Can we not put into their minds, whatever be their station, principles of truth, simplicity of taste, helpfulness, hatred of waste; and, these being firmly rooted, trust to their blossoming up in whatever destiny the young maiden may be called to? We should not then have to witness the terrors that beset dying beds when a family of girls will be left unprovided for; nor the angry shame when some thoughtless young pair commit matrimony, and rush ignorantly into debt,

poverty, and disgrace, from which — *facilis descensus Averni* — all the efforts of too-late compassionate relatives can never altogether raise them.

Nevertheless — and I risk this declaration without fear of its causing a general rush to the register-offices, or the publication, at every out-of-the-way church in the three kingdoms, of surreptitious bans between all the under-aged simpletons who choose to fly in the face of Providence by marrying upon

"Nothing a week, and that uncertain — very!"

— nevertheless, taking life as a whole, believing that it consists not in what we have, but in our power of enjoying the same; that there are in it things nobler and dearer than ease, plenty, or freedom from care — nay, even than existence itself; surely it is not Quixotism, but common-sense and Christianity, to protest that love is better than outside show, labour than indolence, virtue than mere respectability. Truly, in this present day — putting aside those cases where duty and justice have claims higher than either love or happiness — there is many an instance of cowardly selfishness, weakness and falsehood, committed by young people of both sexes, under the names of prudence, honourable feeling, or *obedience to* parents; there is many an act, petted

under the name of a virtue, which is a much blacker crime before God, and of far more fatal result to society at large, than the worst of these so-called improvident marriages.

Strange how much people will sacrifice — ay, even women will — to this Moloch of the world! It reminds me of an infantile worship, which a certain friend of mine confessed to have instituted, and officiated as high-priestess of, at the age of three-and-a-half. She used to collect from her own store, and levy from unwilling co-idolaters, all sorts of childish dainties, together with turnips, apple-parings, &c., and lay them in a remote corner of the farmyard, as an offering to a mysterious invisible being called Dor, who came in the night and feasted thereon — at least, the sacrifice was always gone the next morning. A pious relative, finding her out, stopped with great horror the proceedings of this earnest little heathen; but for years after, nothing would have persuaded my deluded young friend that the awful Dor was, in fact, only a chance-wind, a hen and her chickens, or a hungry old sow. So, often, it is not till half a life-time has been expended on this thankless service, that we come to find out — if we ever do find out — that the invisible Daimon who swallows up the

best of our good things — time, ease, wealth, money, comfort, peace, and well if no more than these — is, after all, a combination of the merest accidents, or perhaps one individual brute beast.

Yet, there is a fascination, hard to account for, but idle to gainsay, in this miserable Eleusinia, this blind worship of a self-invented god. Who does not know the story of the wise old nanny-goat, which painted to her dear daughter that horrible wild beast, the leopard, giving him every conceivable ugliness, a ghastly wide mouth and fiery eyes; so that when the fair Miss Kid saw a beautiful animal with shiny spotted skin and graceful motions, sporting innocently after his own tail in the forest shadow, how could she ever identify him with the portrait her mother drew? What could she do, but approach, and wonder, and admire, then fall right into his clutches, and have her poor little bones crunched between his dazzling jaws? Would not many a mother do well in laying to heart this old fable?

Yes, the world is doubtless very pleasant in its way. Delicious, almost to deliriousness, is a young girl's first step into the enchanted circle called "good society;" to feel herself in her best attire and best *looks,* charming and charmed, for the behoof of the

entire company; or, as it usually soon comes to, poor little fool! for the sake of one particular person therein. And for a long time after, though the first magic of the cup is gone, though it intoxicates rather than exhilarates, it is by no means the poison-cup that frigid moralists would make us believe. It has a little of the narcotic; and the young woman begins to take it as such, feeling rather ashamed of herself for so doing; and, like all opiates, it leaves a slight bitterness in the mouth. But what of that?

Now and then our young lady wonders, during "slow" evening-parties and prosy morning-calls, whether her whistle is worth quite as much as she has daily to pay for it — whether the agreeable circles in which she moves are not, if they would but avow it, for the chief part of the time that they spend together, a very great bore to themselves and to one another — whether, after all, one handful of the salt of the common-sense would not purify society as well as a bushel of idle ceremonies, and one ounce of kind feeling, tact, and thoughtfulness for others, be worth a cart-load of ponderous etiquette. And perhaps she sets to work on this grand, new, and original system of hers, which every young heart thinks it is the very first to discover and practise —

"Like one who tries in little boat
To tug to him the ship afloat."

Most likely she fails — totally, angrily, miserably; only gets herself misjudged and laughed at, and resolves no more to remodel the world — which may be a wise determination; or settles into stolid indifference, and believes that, after all, right and wrong do not much matter; it will all be the same a hundred years hence: so drops slowly into the current, and is drifted with the rest, along, along — whither?

Or else, having just penetration enough left to distinguish a truth from its *eidolon*, its *doppelgänger*, which almost always walks alongside of it, and mimics it, in this strange world of ours, she gradually perceives the sense, beauty, and fitness which may be traced under the most exaggerated of forms and customs. She sees also that these

"Nice customs courtesy to great kings,"

as saith Henry of England when he kisses his French Katherine; and that any woman is unworthy of the just empery of her sex when she gives up to either fashion or ceremony her common-sense, comfort, or good taste: when, for instance, she condescends to make of herself a silk-draped walking butter-tub, or a female

"Whose head
Does grow beneath her shoulders;"

when she suffers herself to waste hour after hour, day after day, year after year, in the company of frivolous folk, whom she can do no good to, and receive no good from, and whom, she is fully aware, if she dropped out of their smiling circle to-morrow, to die in a ditch, in the hospital close by, or were even to create a temporary sensation by jumping from Waterloo Bridge, would merely remark: "Dear me, how shocking! Who would have thought it? — Well, as I was saying . . . ."

No doubt, this conviction, when it fairly breaks upon her, strikes her poor weakened eyes with a painful glare, which throws into harder outline than is natural the cruel angles of this would-be palace — that for a time seems to her little better than a grim dungeon, from which she only seeks to escape —

"Anywhere, anywhere, out of the world."

This is the crisis of her life. She either ends by a tacit, hopeless acquiescence in what she both despises and disbelieves, or herself sinking to their level, accepts them as realities after all. Or else, by a desperate struggle, she creeps from chaos into order, from darkness into clear day, learns slowly and temperately to distinguish things, and people, in their true colours and natural forms; taking them just as they are, no better

and no worse, and trying to make the best of them: to use the world, in short, as its Maker doth — after the example of Him who himself said that the tares and wheat *must* "grow together until the harvest."

Such an one — and I ask those of my sex who read this page, if I have not painted her according to nature? if many weary, dissatisfied hearts, beating heavily with pulses they do not understand, will not confess, that in some poor way I have spoken out their already half-recognised feelings? — such an one will escape that end to which all must come who fix their pleasures alone in this life: the woman of fashion, after the pattern of *Mrs. Skewton* and *Lady Kew:* the woman of "mind," fluttering her faded plumage in the face of a new generation, which recognises her not, or recognises only to make game of her: or the ordinary woman of the world.

This latter — in her day of decline, who has not encountered her some time or another? Dependent on the pity of those who remember what she was, or might have been; invited out, because there is a certain agreeableness about her still, and because, "poor thing, she likes a little society;" yet made irritable by a perpetual need of excitement, which drives her to prefer any-

body's company to her own. Painfully jealous over every fragment of the affection which she herself has never disinterestedly shown to anybody, but has spread it, like school bread and butter, over so wide a surface, that tastelessness is the natural consequence of its extreme tenuity.

Friendships she has none: she never either desired or deserved them. In all her long career, she has never been able to take root in any human heart. As for the Heart Divine, the chances are that she has never once sought it, or believed in it. She has believed in a cushioned pew, in a velvet prayer-book with a gilt cross on the back; in certain religious thoughts, words, and deeds, proper for Sundays and holidays, and possibly suitable for that "convenient season" when she means to "make her peace with Heaven," as the judge tells the criminal who is "turned off," to seek in another existence that hope which man denies. But for all else her soul — contradistinguished from her intellect, which may be vivid and brilliant still — is a blank, a darkness, a death in life.

And yet the woman of the world will one day have to *die!*

We can but leave her to Infinite Mercy then.

CHAPTER X.

Happy and Unhappy Women.

I GIVE fair warning that this is likely to be a "sentimental" chapter. Those who object to the same, and complain that these "Thoughts" are "not practical," had better pass it over at once; since it treats of things essentially unpractical, impossible to be weighed and measured, handled and analysed, yet as real in themselves as the air we breathe and the sunshine we delight in — things wholly intangible, yet the very essence and necessity of our lives.

Happiness! Can any human being undertake to define it for another? Various last-century poets have indulged in "Odes" to it, and good Hannah More wrote a "Search" after it — a most correct, elegantly phrased, and genteel little drama, which, the *dramatis personæ* being all females, and not a bit of love in the whole, is, I believe, still acted in old-fashioned boarding-schools, with great *éclat*. The plot, if I remember right, consists of an elderly lady's leading four or five

younger ones on the immemorial search, through a good many very long speeches; but whether they ever found happiness, or what it was like when found, I really have not the least recollection.

Let us hope that excellent Hannah More is one of the very few who dare venture upon even the primary question — What is Happiness? Perhaps, poor dear woman! she is better able to answer it now.

I fear, the inevitable conclusion we must all come to is, that in this world happiness is quite indefinable. We can no more grasp it than we can grasp the sun in the sky or the moon in the water. We can feel it interpenetrating our whole being with warmth and strength; we can see it in a pale reflection shining elsewhere; or in its total absence, we, walking in darkness, learn to appreciate what it is by what it is not. But I doubt whether any woman ever craved for it, philosophised over it, or — pardon, shade of Barbauld! — commenced the systematic search after it, and ever attained her end. For happiness is not an end — it is only a means, an adjunct, a consequence. The Omnipotent Himself could never be supposed by any, save those who out of their own human selfishness construct

the attributes of Divinity, to be absorbed throughout eternity in the contemplation of His own ineffable bliss, were it not identical with His ineffable goodness and love.

Therefore, whosoever starts with "to be happy" as the *summum bonum* of existence, will assuredly find out she has made as great a mistake as when in her babyhood she cried, as most of us do, for the moon, which we cannot get for all our crying. And yet it is a very good moon, notwithstanding: a real moon, too, who will help us to many a poetical dream, light us in many a lovers' walk, till she shine over the grass of our graves upon a new generation ready to follow upon the immemorial quest. Which, like the quest of the Sangreal, is only possible to pure hearts, although the very purest can never fully attain it, except, like Sir Galahad, through the gates of the Holy City — the New Jerusalem.

Happy and unhappy women — the adjectives being applied less with reference to circumstances than character, which is the only mode of judgment possible — to judge them and discourse of them is a very difficult matter at best. Yet I am afraid it cannot be doubted *that there is* a large average of unhappiness existent

among women: not merely unhappiness of circumstances, but unhappiness of soul — a state of being often as unaccountable as it is irrational, finding vent in those innumerable faults of temper and disposition which arise from no inherent vice, but merely because the individual is not happy.

Possibly, women more than men are liable to this dreary mental eclipse — neither daylight nor darkness. A man will go poetically wretched or morbidly misanthropic, or any great misfortune will overthrow him entirely, drive him to insanity, lure him to slip out of life through the terrible by-road of suicide; but he rarely drags on existence from year to year, with "nerves," "low spirits," and the various maladies of mind and temper that make many women a torment to themselves, and a burden to all connected with them.

Why is this? and is it inevitable? Any one who could in the smallest degree answer this question, would be doing something to the lessening of a great evil — greater than many other evils which, being social and practical, show more largely on the aggregate census of female woe.

Most assuredly, however unpoetical may be such a

view of the matter, the origin of a great deal of unhappiness is physical disease; or rather, the loss of that healthy condition of body, which in the present state of civilisation, so far removed from a state of nature, can only be kept up in any individual by the knowledge and practice of the ordinary laws of hygiene — generally the very last knowledge that women seem to have. The daily necessities of water, fresh air, proper clothing, food, and sleep, with the due regulation of each of these, without which no human being can expect to live healthily or happily, are matters in which the only excuse for lamentable neglect is still more lamentable ignorance.

An ignorance the worse, because it is generally quite unacknowledged. If you tell a young girl that water, the colder the better, is essential to every pore of her delicate skin every morning; that moderate outdoor exercise, and regularity in eating, sleeping, employment, and amusement, are to her a daily necessity; that she should make it a part of her education to acquire a certain amount of current information on sanitary science, and especially on the laws of her own being, physical and mental: tell her this, and the chances are *she will stare* at you uncomprehendingly, or be

shocked, as if you were saying to her something "improper," or answer flippantly: "Oh, yes; I know all that."

But of what use is the knowledge? — when she lies in bed till ten o' the clock, and sits up till any hour the next morning; eats all manner of food at all manner of irregular intervals; is horrified at leaving her bed-room window two inches open, or at being caught in a slight shower; yet will cower all day over the fire in a high woollen dress, and put on a low muslin one in the evening. When she wears all winter thin boots, gossamer stockings, a gown open at the chest and arms, and a loose mantle that every wind blows under, yet wonders that she always has a cold! — and weighs herself down in summer-time with four petticoats heaped one over the other, yet is quite astonished that she gets hot and tired so soon! Truly any sensible, old-fashioned body, who knows how much the health, happiness, and general well-being of this generation — and, alas! not this generation alone — depend upon these charming, lovable, fascinating young fools, cannot fail to be "aggravated" by them every day.

However humiliating the fact may be to those poetical theorists who, in spite of all the laws of nature,

wish to make the soul entirely independent of the body — forgetting, that if so, its temporary probation in the body at all, would have been quite unnecessary — I repeat, there can be no really sanitary state of mind without a similar condition of body; and that one of the first requisites of happiness is *good health.* But as this is not meant to be an essay on domestic hygiene, I had better here leave the subject.

Its corresponding phase opens a gate of misery so wide that one almost shrinks from entering it. Infinite, past human counting or judging, are the causes of mental unhappiness. Many of them spring from a real foundation, of sorrows varied beyond all measuring or reasoning upon: of these, I do not attempt to speak, for words would be idle and presumptuous; I only speak of that frame of mind — sometimes left behind by a great trouble, sometimes arising from troubles purely imaginary — which is called "an unhappy disposition."

Its root of pain is manifold; but, with women, undoubtedly can be oftenest traced to something connected with the affections: not merely the passion called *par excellence* love, but the entire range of personal sympathies and attachments, out of which we draw the

sweetness and bitterness of the best part of our lives. If otherwise — if, as the phrase goes, an individual happens to have "more head than heart," she may be a very clever, agreeable personage, but she is not properly *a woman* — not the creature who, with all her imperfections, is nearer to heaven than man, in one particular — she "loves much." And loving is so frequently, nay, inevitably, identical with suffering, either with, or for, or from, the object beloved, that we need not go further to find the cause of the many anxious, soured faces, and irritable tempers, that we meet with among women.

Charity cannot too deeply or too frequently call to mind how very difficult it is to be good, or amiable, or even commonly agreeable, when one is inwardly miserable. This fact is not enough recognised by those very worthy people who take such a world of pains to make other people virtuous, and so very little to make them happy. They sow good seed, are everlastingly weeding and watering, give it every care and advantage under the sun — except sunshine — and then they wonder that it does not flower!

One may see many a young woman who has, outwardly speaking, "everything she can possibly want,"

absolutely withering in the atmosphere of a loveless home, exposed to those small ill-humours by which people mean no harm — only *do* it; chilled by reserve, wounded by neglect, or worried by anxiety over some thoughtless one, who might so easily have spared her it all; safe from either misfortune or ill-treatment, yet harassed daily by petty pains and unconscious cruelties, which a stranger might laugh at; and she laughs herself, when she counts them up, they are so very small — yet they are there.

"I can bear anything," said to me a woman no longer very young or very fascinating, or particularly clever, who had gone through seas of sorrow, yet whose blue eyes still kept the dewiness and cheerfulness of their youth; "I can bear anything, except unkindness."

She was right. There are numberless cases where gentle creatures, who would have endured bravely any amount of real trouble, have their lives frozen up by those small unkindnesses which copy-books avouch to be "a great offence;" where an avalanche of worldly benefits, an act of undoubted generosity, or the most conscientious administering of a friendly rebuke, has *had its good* effects wholly neutralised by the manner

in which it was done. It is vain to preach to people unless you also love them — Christianly love them; it is not the smallest use to try to make people good, unless you try at the same time — and they feel that you are trying — to make them happy. And you rarely can make another happy, unless you are happy yourself.

Naming the affections as the chief source of unhappiness among our sex, it would be wrong to pass over one phase of them, which must nevertheless be touched tenderly and delicately, as one that women instinctively hide out of sight and comment — I mean what is usually termed "a disappointment." Alas! — as if there were no disappointments but those of love! and yet, until men and women are made differently from what God made them, it must always be, from its very secretness and inwardness, the sharpest of all pangs, save that of conscience.

A lost love. Deny it who will, ridicule it, treat it as mere imagination and sentiment, the thing is and will be; and women do suffer therefrom in all its infinite varieties: loss by death, by faithlessness or unworthiness, and by mistaken or unrequited affection. Of these, the second is beyond all question the worst

There is in death a consecration which lulls the sharpest personal anguish into comparative calm; and in time there comes, to all pure and religious natures, that sense of total possession of the objects beloved, which death alone gives — that faith, which is content to see them safe landed out of the troubles of this changeful life, into the life everlasting. And an attachment which has always been on one side only, has a certain incompleteness which prevents its ever knowing the full agony of having and losing, while at the same time it preserves to the last a dreamy sanctity which sweetens half its pain. But to have loved and lost, either by that total disenchantment which leaves compassion as the sole substitute for love which can exist no more, or by the slow torment which is obliged to let go day by day all that constitutes the diviner part of love — namely, reverence, belief, and trust, yet clings desperately to the only thing left it, a long-suffering apologetic tenderness — this lot is probably the hardest any woman can have to bear.

> "What is good for a bootless bene? —
> And she made answer, Endless sorrow."

No. There is no sorrow under heaven which is, or ought to be, endless. To believe or to make it so, is

an insult to Heaven itself. Each of us must have known more than one instance when a saintly or heroic life has been developed from what at first seemed a stroke like death itself; a life full of the calmest and truest happiness — because it has bent itself to the Divine will, and learned the best of all lessons, to endure. But how that lesson is learned, through what bitter teaching, hard to be understood or obeyed, till the hand of the Great Teacher is recognised clearly through it all, is a subject too sacred to be entered upon here.

It is a curious truth — and yet a truth forced upon us by daily observation — that it is *not* the women who have suffered most who are the unhappy women. A state of permanent unhappiness — not the morbid, half-cherished melancholy of youth, which generally wears off with wiser years, but that settled, incurable discontent and dissatisfaction with all things and all people, which we see in some women, is, with very rare exceptions, at once the index and the exponent of a thoroughly selfish character. Nor can it be too early impressed upon every girl that this condition of mental *mal-aise*, whatever be its origin, is neither a poetical nor a beautiful thing, but a mere disease, and as such

ought to be combated and medicined with all remedies in her power, practical, corporeal, and spiritual. For though it is folly to suppose that happiness is a matter of volition, and that we can make ourselves content and cheerful whenever we choose — a theory that many poor hypochondriacs are taunted with till they are nigh driven mad — yet, on the other hand, no sane mind is ever left without the power of self-discipline and self-control, in a measure, which measure increases in proportion as it is exercised.

Let any sufferer be once convinced that she has this power — that it is possible by careful watch, or, better, by substitution of subjects and occupations, to abstract her mind from dwelling on some predominant idea, which otherwise runs in and out of the chambers of the brain like a haunting devil, at last growing into the monomania which, philosophy says, every human being is affected with, on some one particular point — only, happily, he does not know it; only let her try if she has not, with regard to her mental constitution, the same faculty which would prevent her from dancing with a sprained ankle, or imagining that there is an earthquake because her own head is spinning with *fever*, and she will have at least taken the first steps

towards cure. As many a man sits wearying his soul out by trying to remedy some grand flaw in the plan of society, or the problem of the universe, when perhaps the chief thing wrong is his own liver, or overtasked brain; so many a woman will pine away to the brink of the grave with an imaginary broken heart, or sour to the very essence of vinegar on account of everybody's supposed ill-usage of her, when it is her own restless, dissatisfied, selfish heart, which makes her at war with everybody.

Would that women — and men, too, but that their busier and more active lives save most of them from it — could be taught from their childhood to recognise as an evil spirit this spirit of causeless melancholy — this demon which dwells among the tombs, and yet, which first shows itself in such a charming and picturesque form, that we hug it to our innocent breasts, and never suspect that it may enter in and dwell there till we are actually "possessed;" cease almost to be accountable beings, and are fitter for a lunatic asylum than for the home-circle, which, be it ever so bright and happy, has always, from the inevitable misfortunes of life, only too much need of sunshine rather than shadow, or permanent gloom.

Oh, if such women did but know what comfort there is in a cheerful spirit! how the heart leaps up to meet a sunshiny face, a merry tongue, an even temper, and a heart which either naturally, or, what is better, from conscientious principle, has learned to take all things on their bright side, believing that the Giver of life being all-perfect Love, the best offering we can make to Him is to enjoy to the full what He sends of good, and bear what He allows of evil! — like a child who, when once it thoroughly believes in its father, believes in all his dealings with it, whether it understands them or not.

And here, if the subject were not too solemn to be more than touched upon, — yet no one dare avoid it who believes that there are no such distinctions as "secular" and "religious," but that the whole earth with all therein is, not only on Sundays, but all days, continually "the LORD'S" — I will put it to most people's experience, which is better than a hundred homilies, whether, though they may have known sincere Christians who, from various causes, were not altogether happy, they ever knew one *happy* person, man or woman, who, whatever his or her form of creed might be, was not in heart, and speech, and

daily life, emphatically a follower of Christ — a Christian?

Among the many secondary influences which can be employed either by or upon a naturally anxious or morbid temperament, there is none so ready to hand, or so wholesome, as that one incessantly referred to in the course of these pages, — constant employment. A very large number of women, particularly young women, are by nature constituted so exceedingly restless of mind, or with such a strong physical tendency to nervous depression, that they can by no possibility keep themselves in a state of even tolerable cheerfulness, except by being continually occupied. At what, matters little; even apparently useless work is far better for them than no work at all. To such I cannot too strongly recommend the case of

> "Honest John Tomkins, the hedger and ditcher,
> Who, though he was poor, didn't want to be richer,"

but always managed to keep in a state of sublime content and superabundant gaiety; and how?

> "He always had something or other to do,
> If not for himself — for his neighbour."

And that work for our neighbour is perhaps the most useful and satisfactory of the two, because it

takes us out of ourselves; which, to a person who has not a happy self to rest in, is one good thing achieved: this, quite apart from the abstract question of benevolence, or the notion of keeping a balance-sheet with Heaven for work done to our fellow-creatures — certainly a very fruitless recipe for happiness.

The sufferer, on waking in the morning — that cruel moment when any incurable pain wakes up too, sharply, so sharply! and the burden of a monotonous life falls down upon us, or rises like a dead blank wall before us, making us turn round on the pillow longing for another night, instead of an insupportable day — should rouse herself with the thought: "Now, what have I got to do to-day?" (Mark, not to enjoy or to suffer, only *to do*.) She should never lie down at night without counting up, with a resolute, uncompromising, unexcusing veracity, "How much have I done to-day?" "I can't be happy," she may ponder wearily; "'tis useless trying — so we'll not think about it: but how much have I done this day? how much can I do to-morrow?" And if she has strength steadily to fulfil this manner of life, it will be strange if, some day, the faint, involuntary thrill that we call "feeling happy" — something like that with which we stop to see a daisy

at our feet in January — does not come and startle into vague, mysterious hope, the poor wondering heart.

Another element of happiness, incalculable in its influence over those of sensitive and delicate physical organisation, is Order. Any one who has just quitted a disorderly household, where the rooms are untidy and "littery," where meals take place at any hour and in any fashion, where there is a general atmosphere of noise, confusion, and irregularity; of doing things at all times and seasons, or not doing anything in particular all day over; who, emerging from this, drops into a quiet, busy, regular family, where each has an appointed task, and does it; where the day moves on smoothly, subdivided by proper seasons of labour, leisure, food, and sleep — oh, what a Paradise it seems! How the restless or anxious spirit nestles down in it, and, almost without volition, falls into its cheerful round, recovering tone, and calm, and strength.

"Order is Heaven's first law,"

and a mind without order can by no possibility be either a healthy or a happy mind. Therefore, beyond all sentimental sympathy, or contemptuous blame, should be impressed upon all women inclined to melancholy, or weighed down with any irremediable grief,

this simple advice — to make their daily round of life as harmoniously methodical as they possibly can; leaving no odd hours, scarcely an odd ten minutes, to be idle and dreary in; and by means of orderly-arranged, light, airy rooms, neat dress, and every pleasant external influence that is attainable, to leave untried none of these secondary means which are in the power of every one of us, for our own benefit or that of others, and the importance of which we never know until we have proved them.

There is another maxim — easy to give, and hard to practise — Accustom yourself always to look at the bright side of things, and never make a fuss about trifles. It is pitiful to see what mere nothings some women will worry and fret over — lamenting as much over an ill-made gown as others do over a lost fortune; how some people we can always depend upon for making the best, instead of the worst, of whatever happens, thus greatly lessening our anxieties for themselves in their troubles; and, oh! how infinitely comforting when we bring to them any of our own. For we all of us have — wretched, indeed, if we have not! — some friends, or friend, to whom we instinctively carry every one of our griefs or vexations,

assured that, if any one can help us, they can and will; while with others we as instinctively "keep ourselves to ourselves," whether sorrowing or rejoicing; and many more there are whom we should never dream of burdening with our cares at all, any more than we would think of putting a butterfly in harness.

The disposition which can bear trouble; which, while passing over the lesser annoyances of life, as unworthy to be measured in life's whole sum, can yet meet real affliction steadily, struggle with it while resistance is possible; conquered, sit down patiently, to let the storms sweep over; and on their passing, if they pass, rise up, and go on its way, looking up to that region of blue calm which is never long invisible to the pure of heart — this is the blessedest possession that any woman can have. Better than a house full of silver and gold, better than beauty, or high fortunes, or prosperous and satisfied love.

While, on the other hand, of all characters not radically bad, there is none more useless to herself and everybody else, who inflicts more pain, anxiety, and gloom on those around her, than the one who is often deprecatingly or apologetically described as being "of an unhappy temperament." You may know her at

once by her dull or vinegar aspect, her fidgety ways, her proneness to take the hard or ill-natured view of things and people. Possibly she is unmarried, and her mocking acquaintance insult womanhood by setting down that as the cause of her disagreeableness. Most wicked libel! There never was an unhappy old maid yet who would not have been equally unhappy as a wife — and more guilty, for she would have made two people miserable instead of one. It needs only to count up all the unhappy women one knows — women whom one would not change lots with for the riches of the Queen of Sheba — to see that most of them are those whom fate has apparently loaded with benefits, love, home, ease, luxury, leisure; and denied only the vague fine something, as indescribable as it is unattainable, — the capacity to enjoy them all.

Unfortunate ones! You see by their countenances that they never know what it is to enjoy. That thrill of thankful gladness, oftenest caused by little things — a lovely bit of nature, a holiday after long toil, a sudden piece of good news, an unexpected face, or a letter that warms one's inmost heart — to them is altogether incomprehensible. To hear one of them in her rampant phase, you would suppose the whole ma-

chinery of the universe, down even to the weather, was in league against her small individuality; that everything everybody did, or said, or thought was with one sole purpose — her personal injury. And when she sinks to the melancholy mood, though your heart may bleed for her, aware how horribly real are her self-created sufferings, still your tenderness sits uneasily, more as a duty than a pleasure; and you often feel, and are shocked at feeling, that her presence acts upon you like the proverbial wet-blanket, and her absence gives you an involuntary sense of relief.

For, though we may pity the unhappy ever so lovingly and sincerely, and strive with all our power to lift them out of their grief, — when they hug it and refuse to be lifted out of it, patience sometimes fails. Human life is so full of pain, that once past the youthful delusion that a sad countenance is interesting, and an incurable woe the most delightful thing possible, the mind instinctively turns where it can get rest, and cheer, and sunshine. And the friend who can bring to it the largest portion of these is, of a natural necessity, the most useful, the most welcome, and the most dear.

The "happy woman" — in this our world, which is apparently meant to be the road to perfection, never

its goal — you will find too few specimens to be ever likely to mistake her. But you will recognise her presence the moment she crosses your path. Not by her extreme liveliness — lively people are rarely either happy or able to diffuse happiness; but by a sense of brightness and cheerfulness that enters with her — as an evening sunbeam across your parlour wall. Like the fairy Order in the nursery tale, she takes up the tangled threads of your mind, and reduces them to regularity, till you distinguish a clear pattern through the ugly maze. She may be neither handsome, nor clever, nor entertaining, yet somehow she makes you feel "comfortable," because she is so comfortable herself. She shames you out of your complainings, for she makes none. Yet, mayhap, since it is the divine law that we should all, like our Master, be "made perfect through suffering," you are fully aware that she has had far more sorrow than ever you had; that her daily path, had you to tread it, would be to you as gloomy and full of pitfalls as to her it is safe and bright. She may have even less than the medium lot of earthly blessings, yet all she has she enjoys to the full; and it is so pleasant to see any one enjoy! For her sorrows, she neither hypocritically denies, nor

proudly smothers them — she simply bears them; therefore they come to her, as sorrows were meant to come, naturally and wholesomely, and passing over, leave her full of compassion for all who may have to endure the same.

Thus, whatever her fate may be, married or single, rich or poor, in health or sickness — though a cheerful spirit has twice as much chance of health as a melancholy one — she will be all her days a living justification of the ways of Providence, Who makes the light as well as the darkness, nay, makes the light out of the darkness. For not only in the creation of a world, but in that which is equally marvellous, the birth and development of every human soul, there is a divine verity symbolised by the one line, —

"And God said, Let there be light! and *there was light!*"

CHAPTER XI.

Lost Women.

I ENTER on this subject with a hesitation strong enough to have prevented my entering on it at all, did I not believe that to write for or concerning women, and avoid entirely that deplorable phase of womanhood which, in country cottages as in city streets, in books, newspapers, and daily talk, meets us so continually that no young girl can long be kept ignorant of it, is to give a one-sided and garbled view of life, which, however pretty and pleasant, would be false, and being false, useless. We have not to construct human nature afresh, but to take it as we find it, and make the best of it: we have no right, not even the most sensitive of us women, mercifully constituted with less temptation to evil than men, to treat as impure what God has not made impure, or to shrink with sanctimonious ultra-delicacy from the barest mention of things which, though happy circumstances of temperament or education have shielded us from ever being touched or

harmed thereby, we must know to exist. If we do not know it, our ignorance — quite a different thing from innocence — is at once both helpless and dangerous: narrows our judgment, exposes us to a thousand painful mistakes, and greatly limits our power of usefulness in the world.

On the other hand, a woman who is for ever paddling needlessly in the filthy puddles of human nature, just as a child delights in walking up a dirty gutter when there is a clean pavement alongside, deserves, like the child, whatever mud she gets. And there is even a worse kind of woman still, only too common among respectable matrons, talkative old maids, and even worldly, fascinating young ones, who is ready to rake up every scandalous tale, and titter over every vile *double entendre*, who degrades the most solemn mysteries of holy Nature into vehicles for disgraceful jokes, whose mind, instead of being a decent dwelling-house, is a perfect Augean stable of uncleanness. Such a one cannot be too fiercely reprobated, too utterly despised. However intact her reputation, she is as great a slur upon womanhood, as great a bane to all true modesty, as the most unchaste Messalina who ever disgraced her sex.

I beg to warn these foul grubbers in the dark places of the earth — not for purposes of cleansing, but merely because it amuses them — that they will not find anything entertaining in this article. They will only find one woman's indignant protest against a tone of thought and conversation which, as their consciences will tell them, many other women think it no shame to pursue when among their own sex; and which, did the other sex know it, would be as harmful, as fatal, as any open vice, by making men disbelieve in virtue — disbelieve in *us*. For its vileness in the sight of Heaven — truly, if we think of that, many a well-reputed British lady is as much a "lost" woman as any poor, seduced creature whose child is born in a workhouse, or strangled at a ditchside.

It is to the latter class, who have fallen out of the ranks of honest women, without sinking to a lower depth still, that I chiefly refer: because with them, those for whom this book is meant — namely, the ordinary middle ranks of unmarried females — are more likely to have to do. That other class, awful in its extent and universality, of women who make a trade of sin, whom philanthropists and political economists are for ever discussing, and can come to no conclusion

about — I leave to the wise and generous of both sexes who devote their lives to the subject; to the examination and amelioration of a fact so terrible that, were it not a fact, one would hardly be justified in alluding to it here. Wretched ones! whom even to think of turns any woman's heart cold, with shame for her own sex, and horror at the other: outcasts to whom happiness and love are things unknown, God and heaven mere words to swear with, and to whom this earth must be a daily hell:

"Non ragionam di lor, ma guarda, e passa."

But the others cross our path continually. No one can have taken any interest in the working-classes without being aware how frightfully common among them is what they term "a misfortune" — how few young women come to the marriage-altar at all, or come there just a week or two before maternity; or having already had several children, often only half brothers and sisters, whom no ceremony has ever legalised. Whatever be the causes of this — and I merely skim over the surface of a state of things which the *Times* and Sanitary Commissioners have plumbed to sickening depths — it undoubtedly exists; and no single woman who takes any thought of what is going

on around her, no mistress or mother who requires constantly servants for her house, and nursemaids for her children, can or dare blind herself to the fact. It is easy for tenderly reared young ladies, who study human passions through Miss Austen or Miss Edgeworth, or the *Loves of the Angels,* to say: "How shocking! Oh, it can't be true!" But it is true; and they will not live many more years without finding it to be true. Better face truth at once, in all its bareness, than be swaddled up for ever in the folds of a silken falsehood.

Another fact, stranger still to account for, is, that the women who thus fall are by no means the worst of their station. I have heard it affirmed by more than one lady — by one in particular, whose experience is as large as her benevolence — that many of them are of the very best; refined, intelligent, truthful, and affectionate.

"I don't know how it is," she would say — "whether their very superiority makes them dissatisfied with their own rank — such brutes or clowns as abouring men often are! — so that they fall easier victims to the rank above them; or whether, though this theory will shock many people, other virtues can

exist and flourish, entirely distinct from, and after the loss of, that which we are accustomed to believe the indispensable prime virtue of our sex — chastity. I cannot explain it; I can only say that it is so: that some of my most promising village-girls have been the first to come to harm; and some of the best and most faithful servants I ever had, have been girls who have fallen into shame, and who, had I not gone to the rescue, and put them on the way to do well, would infallibly have become 'lost' women."

There, perhaps, is one clue caught. Had she not "come to the rescue." Rescue, then, is possible; and they were capable of being rescued.

I read lately an essay, and from a pure and good woman's pen, too, arguing, what licentious materialists are now-a-days unblushingly asserting, that chastity is *not* indispensable in our sex; that the old chivalrous boast of families — "all their men were brave, and all their women virtuous" — was, to say the least, a mistake, which led people into worse ills than it remedied, by causing an extravagant terror at the loss of these good qualities, and a corresponding indifference to evil ones much more important.

While widely differing from this writer — for God

forbid that our Englishwomen should ever come to regard with less horror than now the loss of personal chastity! — I think it cannot be doubted that even this loss does not indicate total corruption or entail permanent degradation; that after it, and in spite of it, many estimable and womanly qualities may be found existing, not only in our picturesque *Nell Gwynnes* and *Peg Woffingtons*, but our poor every-day sinners: the servant obliged to be dismissed without a character and with a baby; the sempstress quitting starvation for elegant infamy; the illiterate village lass, who thinks it so grand to be made a lady of — so much better to be a rich man's mistress than a working-man's ill-used wife, or rather slave.

Till we allow that no one sin, not even this sin, necessarily corrupts the entire character, we shall scarcely be able to judge it with that fairness which gives hope of our remedying it, or trying to lessen in ever so minute a degree, by our individual dealing with any individual case that comes in our way, the enormous aggregate of misery that it entails. This it behoves us to do, even on selfish grounds, for it touches us closer than many of us are aware — ay, in our hearths and homes — in the sons and brothers that

we have to send out to struggle in a world of which we at the fireside know absolutely nothing; if we marry, in the fathers we give to our innocent children, the servants we trust their infancy to, and the influences to which we are obliged to expose them daily and hourly, unless we were to bring them up in a sort of domestic Happy Valley, which their first effort would be to get out of as fast as ever they could. And supposing we are saved from all this; that our position is one peculiarly exempt from evil; that if pollution in any form comes nigh us, we just sweep it hastily and noiselessly away from our doors, and think we are all right and safe. Alas! we forget that a refuse-heap outside her gate may breed a plague even in a queen's palace.

One word, before continuing this subject. Many of us will not investigate it because they are afraid: afraid, not so much of being, as of being thought to be, especially by the other sex, incorrect, indelicate, unfeminine; of being supposed to know more than they ought to know, or than the present refinement of society — a good and beautiful thing when real — concludes that they do know.

O women! women! why have you not more faith

in yourselves — in that strong inner purity which alone can make a woman brave! which if she knows herself to be clean in heart and desire, in body and soul, loving cleanness for its own sake, and not for the credit that it brings, will give her a freedom of action and a fearlessness of consequences which are to her a greater safeguard than any external decorum. To be, and not to seem, is the amulet of her innocence.

Young women, who look forward to marriage and motherhood, in all its peace and dignity as your natural lot, have you ever thought for a moment what it must be to feel that you have lost innocence, that no power on earth can ever make you innocent any more, or give you back that jewel of glory and strength, having which, as the old superstition says,

> "Even the lion will turn and flee
> From a maid in the pride of her purity?"

That, whether the world knows it or not, *you* know yourself to be — not this? The free, happy ignorance of maidenhood is gone for ever; the sacred dignity and honour of matronhood is not, and never can be attained. Surely this consciousness alone must be the most awful punishment to any woman; and from it no kindness, no sympathy, no concealment of shame, or even resto-

ration to good repute, can entirely free her. She must bear her burden, lighter or heavier as it may seem at different times, and she must bear it to the day of her death. I think this fact alone is enough to make a chaste woman's first feeling towards an unchaste that of unqualified, unmitigated pity.

This, not in the form of exaggerated sentimentalism, with which it has of late been the fashion to treat such subjects, laying all the blame upon the seducer, and exalting the seduced into a paragon of injured simplicity, whom society ought to pet, and soothe, and treat with far more interest and consideration than those who have not erred. Never, as it seems to me, was there a greater mistake than that into which some writers have fallen, in fact and fiction, but especially in fiction, through their generous over-eagerness to redeem the lost. These are painted — one heroine I call to mind now — as such patterns of excellence, that we wonder, first, how they ever could have been led astray, and secondly, whether this exceeding helplessness and simplicity of theirs did not make the sin so venial, that it seems as wrong to blame them for it as to scold a child for tumbling into an open well. Consequently, their penitence becomes unnecessary and unnatural; their

suffering disproportionably unjust. You close the book, inclined to arraign society, morality, and, what is worse, Providence; but for all else, feeling that the question is left much as you found it; that angelic sinners such as these, if they do exist, are such exceptions to the generality of their class, that their example is of very little practical service to the rest.

To refine away error till it is hardly error at all, to place vice under such extenuating circumstances that we cannot condemn it for sheer pity, is a fault so dangerous that Charity herself ought to steel her heart against it. Far better and safer to call Crime by its right name, and paint it in its true colours — treating it even as the Ragged Schools did the young vagabonds of our streets — not by persuading them and society that they were clean, respectable, ill-used, and maligned individuals; or by waiting for them to grow decent before they dealt with them at all, but by simply saying: "Come, just as you are — ragged, dirty, dishonest. Only come, and we will do our best to make you what you ought to be."

Allowing the pity, which, as I said, ought to be a woman's primary sentiment towards her lost sisterhood, what is the next thing to be done? Surely there must

be some light beyond that of mere compassion to guide her in her after-conduct towards them?

Where shall we find this light? In the world and its ordinary code of social morality, suited to social convenience? I fear not. The general opinion, even among good men, seems to be that this great question is a very sad thing, but a sort of unconquerable necessity; there is no use in talking about it, and indeed the less it is talked of the better. Good women are much of the same mind. The laxer-principled of both sexes treat the matter with philosophical indifference, or with the kind of laugh that makes the blood boil in any truly virtuous heart.

Then, where are we to look? —

"I came not to call the righteous, but *sinners* to repentance."
"Neither do I condemn thee: go and *sin no more*."
"Her *sins, which are many*, are forgiven; because she loved much."

These words, thus quoted here, may raise a sneer on the lips of some, and shock others who are accustomed to put on religion with their Sunday clothes, and take it off on Monday, as quite too fine, maybe too useless for every-day wear. But I must write them, because I believe them. I believe there is no other light on this difficult question than that given by the Ne

Testament. There, clear and plain, and everywhere repeated, shines the doctrine — of which, until then, there was little or no trace, either in external or revealed religion — that for every crime, being repented of and forsaken, there is forgiveness with Heaven; and if with Heaven, there ought to be with men. This, without entering at all into the doctrinal question of atonement, but simply taking the basis of Christian morality, is, pardon, full and free, for all transgressors, on condition that they "sin no more."

All who have had any experience among criminals — from the poor little "black sheep" of the family, who is always getting into trouble, and is told continually by everybody that, strive as he will, he never can be a good boy, like brother Tommy, down to the lowest, most reprobate convict, who is shipped off to the colonies because the mother-country cannot exactly hang him, and does not know what else to do with him — unite in stating that, when you shut the door of hope on any human soul, you may at once give up all chance of its reformation. As well bid a man eat without food, see without light, or breathe without air, as bid him mend his ways, while at the same time you tell him that, however he amends, he will be in just the same

position — the same hopelessly degraded, unpardoned, miserable sinner.

Yet this is practically the language used to fallen women, and chiefly by their own sex: "God may forgive you, but we never can!" — a declaration which, however common, in spirit if not in substance, is, when one comes to analyse it, unparalleled in its arrogance of blasphemy.

That for a single offence, however grave, a whole life should be blasted, is a doctrine repugnant even to Nature's own dealings in the visible world. There, her voice clearly says — "Let all these wonderful powers of vital renewal have free play: let the foul flesh slough itself away; lop off the gangrened limb; enter into life maimed, if it must be:" but never, till the last moment of total dissolution, does she say: "Thou shalt not enter into life at all."

Therefore, once let a woman feel that, in moral as in physical disease, "while there is life there is hope" — dependent on the one only condition that she shall *sin no more*, and what a future you open for her! what a weight you lift off from her poor miserable spirit, which might otherwise be crushed down to the lowe

deep, to that which is far worse than any bodily pollution, ineradicable corruption of soul!

The next thing to be set before her is courage. That intolerable dread of shame, which is the last token of departing modesty, to what will it not drive some women! To what self-control and ingenuity, what resistance of weakness and endurance of bodily pain, which, in another cause, would be called heroic — blunting every natural instinct, and goading them on the last refuge of mortal fear — infanticide.

Surely, even by this means, many a woman might be saved, if there were any one to save her, any one to say plainly: "What are you afraid of — God or man? your sin or its results?" Alas! it will be found almost invariably the latter: loss of position, of character, and consequently of the means of livelihood. Respectability shuts the door upon her; mothers will not let their young folks come into contact with her; mistresses will not take her as a servant. Nor can one wonder at this, even while believing that in many cases the fear is much more selfish than virtuous, and continued long after its cause has entirely ceased to exist. It is one of the few cases in which — at least at first — the sufferers cannot help themselves; they must suffer for a season:

they must bear patiently the working out of that immutable law which makes sin, sooner or later, its own Nemesis.

But not for ever — and it is worth while, in considering this insane terror of worldly opinion, to ask: "Which half of the world are you afraid of, the good or the bad?" For it may often be noticed, the less virtuous people are, the more they shrink away from the slightest whiff of the odour of un-sanctity. The good are ever the most charitable, the pure are the most brave. I believe there are hundreds and thousands of Englishwomen who would willingly throw the shelter of their stainless repute around any poor creature who came to them and said honestly: "I have sinned — help me that I may sin no more." But the unfortunates will not believe this. They are like the poor Indians, who think it necessary to pacify the evil principle by a greater worship than that which they offer to the Good Spirit; because, they say, the Bad Spirit is the stronger. Have we not, even in this Britain, far too many such tacit devil-worshippers?

Given a chance, the smallest chance, and a woman's redemption lies in her own hands. She cannot be too strongly impressed with this fact, or too soon. No hu-

man power could have degraded her against her will; no human power can keep her in degradation unless by her will. Granted the sin, howsoever incurred, wilfully or blindly, or under circumstances of desperate temptation; capable of some palliations, or with no palliation at all — take it just as it stands, in its whole enormity, and — there leave it. Set it aside, at once and altogether, and begin anew. Better beg, or hunger, or die in a ditch — except that the people who die in ditches are not usually the best of even this world's children — than live a day in voluntary unchastity.

This may sound fine and romantic — far too romantic, forsooth, to be applied to any of the cases that we are likely to meet with. And yet it is the plain truth: as true of a king's mistress as of a ruined servant-maid. No help from without can rescue either, unless she wishes to save herself.

She has more power to do this than at first appears; but it must be by the prime agent, Truth.

After the first false step, the principal cause of women's further downfall is their being afraid of truth — truth, which must of necessity be the beginning and end of all attempts at restoration to honour. For the wretched girl, who, in terror of losing a place, or of being turned

from an angry father's door, fabricates tale after tale, denies and denies till she can deny no longer, till all ends in a jail and a charge of child-murder; for the fashionable lady whose life is a long deceit, exposed to constant fear lest a breath should tear her flimsy reputation to rags; and for all the innumerable cases between these two poles of society, there is but one warning — No virtue ever was founded on *a lie*.

The truth, then, at all risks and costs — the truth from the beginning. Make a clean breast to whomsoever you need to make it, and then — face the world.

This must be terrible enough — no denying that; but it must be done: there is no help for it. Perhaps, in many a case, if it were done at once, it would save much after-misery, especially the perpetual dread and danger of exposure, which makes the sin itself quite a secondary consideration compared with the fear of its discovery. This once over, with all its paralysing effects, the worst has come to the worst, and there is a chance of hope.

Begin again. Put the whole past life aside as if it had never been, and try what you can do with the

future. This, I think, should be the counsel given to all erring women not irretrievably "lost."

It would be a blessed thing if our honourable women, mothers and matrons, would consider a little more what could be done with such persons: any openings for useful employment; any positions sufficiently guarded to be safe, and yet free enough to afford trial, without drawing too harshly the line — always harsh enough — between these, and those who are of unblemished reputation. Reformatories, Magdalen Institutions, and the like, are admirable in their way; but there are numberless cases in which individual judgment and help alone are possible. It is this — the train of thought that shall result in act, and which I desire to suggest to individual minds, in the hope of arousing that imperceptibly small influence of the many, which forms the strongest lever of universal opinion.

I said in a former paper, that the only way to make people good, is to make them happy. Strange that this truth should apply to circumstances like these now written of! and yet it does; and it would be vain to deny it. Bid a woman lift up her head and live; tell her that she can and ought to live, and you must give her something to live for. You must put into her

poor sore heart, if you can, a little more than peace — comfort. And where is she to find it?

Heterodox as the doctrine may appear to some, it seems to me that Heaven always leaves its sign of hope and redemption on any woman when she is left with a child. Some taste of the ineffable joy, the solemn consecration of maternity, must come even to the most wretched and guilty creature thinking of the double life she bears, or the helpless life to which she has given birth — that life for which she is as responsible to God, to itself, and to the world, as any married mother of them all.

And the sense of responsibility alone conveys a certain amount of comfort and hope. One can imagine many a sinful mother, who, for the very child's sake, would learn to hate the sin, and to make to the poor innocent the only atonement possible, by giving it what is better even than stainless birth — a virtuous bringing-up. One can conceive such a woman taking her baby in her arms, and starting afresh to face the world — made bold by a love which has no taint in it, and cheered by the knowledge that no human being can take from her either this love, or its duties, or its rewards.

For it rests with herself alone, the comfort she may derive from, and the honour in which she may be held by, her child. A mother's subsequent conduct and character might give a son as much pride in her, and in the nameless parentage which he owes her, as in any long lawful line

> "Whose ignoble blood
> Has crept through scoundrels ever since the flood."

Even a daughter might live to say: "Mother, do not grieve; I had rather have had you, just as you are, than any mother I know. It has been better, for me at least, than if you had married my father."

I have written thus much, and yet, after all, it seems but "words, words, words." Everywhere around us we see women falling, fallen, and we cannot help them; we cannot make them feel the hideousness of sin, the peace and strength of that cleanness of soul which is not afraid of anything in earth or heaven; we cannot force upon their minds the possibility of return, after ever so long wanderings, to those pleasant paths out of which there is no peace and no strength for either man or woman; and in order to this return is needed — for both alike — not so much outside help, as inward repentance.

All I can do — all, I fear, that any one can do by mere speech — is to impress upon every woman, and chiefly on those who, reared innocently in safe homes, view the wicked world without somewhat like gazers at a show or spectators at a battle — shocked, wondering, perhaps pitying a little, but not understanding at all — that this repentance is possible. Also, that once having returned to a chaste life, a woman's former life should never once be "cast up" against her; that she should be allowed to resume, if not her pristine position, at least one that is full of usefulness, pleasantness, and respect — a respect, the amount of which must be determined by her own daily conduct. She should be judged — as, indeed, human wisdom alone has a right to judge, in all cases — solely by what she is now, and not by what she has been. That judgment may be, ought to be, stern and fixed as justice itself with regard to her present, and even her past, so far as concerns the crime committed; but it ought never to take the law into its own hands towards the criminal, who, for all it knows, may have long since become less a criminal than a sufferer. Virtue degrades herself, and loses every vestige of her power, when her dealings with Vice sink into a mere matter of individual opinion,

personal dislike, or selfish fear of harm. For all offences, punishment, retributive and inevitable, must come; but punishment is one thing, revenge is another. ONE only, who is Omniscient as well as Omnipotent, can declare, "Vengeance is *Mine*."

CHAPTER XII.

Growing Old.

" 'Do ye think of the days that are gone, Jeanie,
As ye sit by your fire at night?
Do ye wish that the morn would bring back the time,
When your heart and your step were so light?'
'I think of the days that are gone, Robin,
And of all that I joyed in then;
But the brightest that ever arose on me,
I have never wished back again.' "

GROWING old! A time we talk of, and jest or moralise over, but find almost impossible to realise — at least to ourselves. In others, we can see its approach clearer: yet even then we are slow to recognise it. "What, Miss So-and-so looking old, did you say? Impossible! she is quite a young person: only a year older than I, — and that would make her just .... Bless me! I am forgetting how time goes on. Yes," — with a faint deprecation which truth forbids you to contradict, and politeness to notice, — "I suppose we are neither of us so young as we used to be."

Without doubt, it is a trying crisis in a woman's life — a single woman's particularly — when she be-

gins to suspect she is "not so young as she used to be;" that, after crying "Wolf" ever since the respectable maturity of seventeen — as some young ladies are fond of doing, to the extreme amusement of their friends — the grim wolf, old age, is actually showing his teeth in the distance; and no courteous blindness on the part of these said friends, no alarmed indifference on her own, can neutralise the fact that he is, if still far off, in sight. And, however charmingly poetical he may appear to sweet fourteen-and-a-half, who writes melancholy verses about "I wish I were again a child," or merry three-and-twenty, who preserves in silver paper "my first grey hair," old age, viewed as a near approaching reality, is — quite another thing.

To feel that you have had your fair half at least of the ordinary terms of years allotted to mortals; that you have no right to expect to be any handsomer, or stronger, or happier than you are now; that you have climbed to the summit of life, whence the next step must necessarily be decadence; — ay, though you do not feel it, though the air may be as fresh, and the view as grand — still, you know that it is so. Slower or faster, you are going down-hill. To those who go "hand in-hand,"

"And sleep thegither at the foot,"

it may be a safer and sweeter descent; but I am writing for those who have to make the descent alone.

It is not a pleasant descent at the beginning. When you find at parties that you are not asked to dance as much as formerly, and your partners are chiefly stout, middle-aged gentlemen, and slim lads, who blush terribly and require a great deal of drawing out; — when you are "dear"-ed and patronised by stylish young chits, who were in their cradles when you were a grown woman; or when some boy, who was your plaything in petticoats, has the impertinence to look over your head, bearded and grand, or even to consult you on his love-affairs; — when you find your acquaintance delicately abstaining from the term "old maid" in your presence, or immediately qualifying it by an eager panegyric on the solitary sisterhood; — when servants address you as "Ma'am," instead of "Miss;" and if you are at all stout and comfortable-looking, strange shopkeepers persist in making out your bills to "Mrs. Blank," and pressing upon your notice toys and perambulators.

Rather trying, too, when, in speaking of yourself as a "girl" — which, from long habit, you unwittingly

do — you detect a covert smile on the face of your interlocutor; or, led by chance excitement to deport yourself in an ultra-youthful manner, some instinct warns you that you are making yourself ridiculous. Or catching in some strange looking-glass the face that you are too familiar with to notice much, ordinarily, you suddenly become aware that it is *not* a young face; that it will never be a young face again; that it will gradually alter and alter, until the known face of your girlhood, whether plain or pretty, loved or disliked, admired or despised, will have altogether vanished — nay, is vanished: look as you will, you cannot see it any more.

There is no denying the fact, and it ought to silence many an ill-natured remark upon those unlucky ones who insist on remaining "young ladies of a certain age," — that with most people the passing from maturity to middle age is so gradual, as to be almost imperceptible to the individual concerned. It is very difficult for a woman to recognise that she is growing old; and to many — nay, to all, more or less — this recognition cannot but be fraught with considerable pain. Even the most frivolous are somewhat to be pitied, when, not conducting themselves as *passées*, be-

cause they really do not think it, they expose themselves to all manner of misconstructions by still determinedly grasping that fair sceptre of youth, which they never suspect is now the merest "rag of sovereignty" — sovereignty deposed.

Nor can the most sensible woman fairly put aside her youth, with all it has enjoyed, or lost, or missed; its hopes and interests, omissions and commissions, doings and sufferings; satisfied that it is henceforth to be considered entirely as a thing gone by — without a momentary spasm of the heart. Young people forget this as completely as they forget that they themselves may one day experience the same, or they would not be so ready to laugh at even the foolishest of those foolish old virgins who deems herself juvenile long after everybody else has ceased to share in the pleasing delusion, and thereby makes both useless and ridiculous that season of early autumn which ought to be the most peaceful, abundant, safe, and sacred time in a woman's whole existence. They would not, with the proverbial harsh judgment of youth, scorn so cruelly those poor little absurdities, of which the unlucky person who indulges therein is probably quite unaware — merely dresses as she has always done, and carries on the

harmless coquetries and *minauderies* of her teens, unconscious how exceedingly ludicrous they appear in a lady of — say forty! Yet in this sort of exhibition, which society too often sees and enjoys, any honest heart cannot but often feel, that of all the actors engaged in it the one who plays the least objectionable and disgraceful part is she who only makes a fool of *herself*.

Alas! why should she do it? Why cling so desperately to the youth that will not stay? and which, after all, is not such a very precious or even a happy thing. Why give herself such a world of trouble to deny or conceal her exact age, when half her acquaintance must either know it or guess it, or be supremely indifferent about it? Why appear dressed — *un*dressed, cynics would say — after the pattern of her niece, the belle of the ball; annoying the eye with beauty either half withered or long overblown, and which in its prime would have been all the lovelier for more concealment?

In this matter of dress, a word or two. There are two styles of costume which ladies past their *première jeunesse* are most prone to fall into: one hardly knows which is the worst. Perhaps, though, it is the ultra-

juvenile — such as the insane juxtaposition of a yellow skin and white tarlatane, or the anomalous adorning of grey hair with artificial flowers. It may be questioned whether at any age beyond twenty a ball-costume is really becoming; but after thirty, it is the very last sort of attire that a lady can assume with impunity. It is said that you can only make yourself look younger by dressing a little older than you really are; and truly I have seen many a woman look withered and old in the customary evening-dress which, being unmarried, she thinks necessary to shiver in, who would have appeared fair as a sunshiny October day if she would only have done Nature the justice to assume, in her autumn time, an autumnal livery. If she would only have the sense to believe that grey hair was meant to soften wrinkles and brighten faded cheeks, giving the same effect for which our youthful grandmothers wore powder; that flimsy, light-coloured dresses, fripperied over with trimmings, only suit airy figures and active motions; that a sober-tinted substantial gown and a pretty cap will any day take away ten years from a lady's appearance; — above all, if she would observe this one grand rule of the toilet, always advisable, but after youth indispensable — that though

good personal "points" are by no means a warrant for undue exhibition thereof, no point that is positively unbeautiful ought ever, by any pretence of fashion or custom, to be shown.

The other sort of dress, which, it must be owned, is less frequent, is the dowdy style. People say — though not very soon — "Oh, I am not a young woman now; it does not signify what I wear." Whether they quite believe it is another question; but they say it — and act upon it when laziness or indifference prompts. Foolish women! they forget, that if we have reason at any time more than another to mind our "looks," it is when our looks are departing from us. Youth can do almost anything in the toilet — middle-age cannot; yet is none the less bound to present to her friends and society the most pleasing exterior she can. Easy is it to do this when we have those about us who love us, and take notice of what we wear, and in whose eyes we would like to appear gracious and lovely to the last, so far as nature allows: not easy when things are otherwise. This, perhaps, is the reason why we see so many unmarried women grow careless and "old-fashioned" in their dress — "What does it *signify?* — nobody cares."

I think a woman ought to care a little — a very little — for herself. Without preaching up vanity, or undue waste of time over that most thankless duty of adorning one's self for nobody's pleasure in particular — is it not still a right and becoming feeling to have some respect for that personality which, as well as our soul, Heaven gave us to make the best of? And is it not our duty — considering the great number of uncomely people there are in the world — to lessen it by each of us making herself as little uncomely as she can?

Because a lady ceases to dress youthfully, she has no excuse for dressing untidily; and though having found out that one general style suits both her person, her taste, and her convenience, she keeps to it, and generally prefers moulding the fashion to herself, rather than herself to the fashion, — still, that is no reason why she should try the risible nerves of one generation by showing up to them the out-of-date costume of another. Neatness invariable; hues carefully harmonised, and as time advances, subsiding into a general unity of tone, softening and darkening in colour, until black, white, and grey alone remain, as the suitable garb for old age: these things are every

woman's bounden duty to observe as long as she lives. No poverty, grief, sickness, or loneliness — those mental causes which act so strongly upon the external life — can justify any one (to use a phrase probably soon to be obsolete, when charity and common-sense have left the rising generation no Fifth of November) in thus voluntarily "making a Guy of herself."

That slow, fine, and yet perceptible change of mien and behaviour, natural and proper to advancing years, is scarcely reducible to rule at all. It is but the outer reflection of an inward process of the mind. We only discover its full importance by the absence of it, as noticeable in a person "who has such very 'young' manners," who falls into raptures of enthusiasm, and expresses loudly every emotion of her nature. Such a character, when real, is unobjectionable, nay charming, in extreme youth; but the great improbability of its being real makes it rather ludicrous, if not disagreeable, in mature age, when the passions die out or are quieted down, the sense of happiness itself is calm, and the fullest, tenderest tide of which the loving heart is capable, may be described by those "still waters" which "run deep."

To "grow old gracefully," as one, who truly has

exemplified her theory, has written and expressed it, is a good and beautiful thing; to grow old worthily, a better. And the first effort to that end is not only to recognise, but to become personally reconciled to the fact of youth's departure; to see, or, if not seeing, to have faith in, the wisdom of that which we call change, yet which is in truth progression; to follow openly and fearlessly, in ourselves and our daily life, the same law which makes spring pass into summer, summer into autumn, autumn into winter, preserving an especial beauty and fitness in each of the four.

Yes, if women could only believe it, there is a wonderful beauty even in growing old. The charm of expression arising from softened temper or ripened intellect, often amply atones for the loss of form and colouring; and, consequently, to those who never could boast either of these latter, years give more much than they take away. A sensitive person often requires half a lifetime to get thoroughly used to this corporeal machine, to attain a wholesome indifference both to its defects and perfections, and to learn at last, what nobody would acquire from any teacher but experience, that it is the mind alone which is of any consequence; that with a good temper, sincerity, and a moderate

stock of brains — or even the two former only — any sort of body can in time be made useful, respectable, and agreeable, as a travelling-dress for the soul. Many a one, who was absolutely plain in youth, thus grows pleasant and well-looking in declining years. You will hardly ever find anybody, not ugly in mind, who is repulsively ugly in person after middle life.

So with the character. If a woman is ever to be wise or sensible, the chances are that she will have become so somewhere between thirty and forty. Her natural good qualities will have developed; her evil ones will have either been partly subdued, or have overgrown her like rampant weeds; for, however we may talk about people being "not a whit altered" — "just the same as ever" — not one of us is, or can be, for long together, exactly the same; no more than that the body we carry with us is the identical body we were born with, or the one we supposed ours seven years ago. Therein, as in our spiritual self which inhabits it, goes on a perpetual change and renewal: if this ceased, the result would be, not permanence, but corruption. In moral and mental, as well as physical growth, it is impossible to remain stationary; if we do *not advance*, we retrograde. Talk of "too late to im-

prove" — "too old to learn," &c.! Idle words! A human being should be improving with every day of a lifetime; and will probably have to go on learning throughout all the ages of immortality.

And this brings me to one among the number of what I may term "the pleasures of growing old."

At our outset, "to love" is the verb we are most prone to conjugate; afterwards we discover, that though the first, it is by no means the sole verb in the grammar of life, or even the only one that implies (*vide* Lennie or Murray) "to be, to do, or to suffer." To know — that is, to acquire, to find out, to be able to trace and appreciate the causes of things, gradually becomes a necessity, an exquisite delight. We begin to taste the full meaning of that promise which describes the other world as a place where "we shall know even as we are known." Nay, even this world, with all its burdens and pains, presents itself in a phase of abstract interest entirely apart from ourselves and our small lot therein, whether joyful or sorrowful. We take pleasure in tracing the large workings of all things — more clearly apprehended as we cease to expect, or conduct ourselves as if we expected, that Providence will ap-

pear as *Deus ex machinâ* for our own private benefit. We are able to pass out of our own small daily sphere, and take interest in the marvellous government of the universe; to see the grand workings of cause and effect, the educing of good out of apparent evil, the clearing away of the knots in tangled destinies, general or individual, the wonderful agency of time, change and progress in ourselves, in those surrounding us, and in the world at large. We have lived just long enough to catch a faint tone or two of the large harmonies of nature and fate — to trace the apparent plot and purpose of our own life and that of others, sufficiently to make us content to sit still and see the play played out. As I once heard said, "We feel we should like to go on living, were it only out of curiosity."

In small minds, this feeling expends itself in meddling, gossiping, scandal-mongering; but such are only the abortive developments of a right noble quality, which, properly guided, results in benefits incalculable to the individual and to society. For, undoubtedly, the after-half of life is the best working-time. Beautiful is youth's enthusiasm, and grand are its achievements; but the most solid and permanent good is done by the persistent strength and wide experience of middle age.

A principal agent in this is a blessing which rarely comes till then — contentment: not mere resignation, a passive acquiescence in what cannot be removed, but active contentment; bought, and cheaply, too, by a personal share in that daily account of joy and pain, which the longer one lives the more one sees is pretty equally balanced in all lives. Young people are happy — enjoy ecstatically, either in prospect or fruition, "the top of life;" but they are very seldom contented. It is not possible. Not till the cloudy maze is half travelled through, and we begin to see the object and purpose of it, can we be really content.

One great element in this — nor let us think shame to grant that which God and nature also allow — consists in the doubtful question, "To marry or not to marry?" being by this time generally settled; the world's idle curiosity or impertinent meddling therewith having come to an end; which alone is a great boon to any woman. Her relations with the other sex imperceptibly change their character, or slowly decline. Though there are exceptions, of old lovers who have become friends, and friends whom no new love could make swerve from the fealty of years, still it usually happens so. If a woman wishes to retain her sway

over mankind — not an unnatural wish, even in the good and amiable, who have been long used to attention and admiration in society — she must do it by means quite different from any she has hitherto employed. Even then, be her wit ever so sparkling, her influence ever so pure and true, she will often find her listener preferring bright eyes to intellectual conversation, and the satisfaction of his heart to the improvement of his mind. And who can blame him?

Pleasant as men's society undoubtedly is; honourable, well-informed gentlemen, who meet a lady on the easy neutral ground of mutual esteem, and take more pains to be agreeable to her than, unfortunately, her own sex frequently do: they are, after all, but men. Not one of them is really necessary to a woman's happiness, except *the* one whom, by this time, she has probably either met, or lost, or found. Therefore, however uncomplimentary this may sound to those charming and devoted creatures, which of course they always are in ladies' — young ladies' — society, a lady past her youth may be well content to let them go before they depart of their own accord. I fear the waning coquette, the ancient beauty, as well as the ordinary woman,

PREFACE.

THESE "Thoughts," a portion of which originally appeared in "Chambers' Journal," are, I wish distinctly to state, *only* Thoughts. They do not pretend to solve any problems, to lay down any laws, to decide out of one life's experience and within the limits of one volume, any of those great questions which have puzzled generations, and will probably puzzle generations more. They lift the banner of no party; and assert the opinions of no *clique*. They do not even attempt an originality, which, in treating of a subject like the present, would be either dangerous or impossible.

In this book, therefore, many women will find simply the expression of what they have themselves, consciously or unconsciously, oftentimes thought; and the more deeply, perhaps, because it has never come to the surface in words or writing. Those who do the most, often talk — sometimes think — the least: yet

thinkers, talkers, and doers, being in earnest, achieve their appointed end. The thinkers put wisdom into the mouth of the speakers, and both strive together to animate and counsel the doers. Thus all work harmoniously together; and verily

> "Was never good work wrought,
> Without beginning of good thought."

In the motto which I have chosen for its title-page, lies at once the purpose and preface of this my book. Had it not been planned and completed, honestly, carefully, solemnly, even fearfully, with a keen sense of all it might do, or leave undone; and did not I believe it to be in some degree a good book, likely to effect some good, I would never have written or published it. How much good it may do, or how little, is not mine either to know, to speculate, or to decide.

I have written it, I hope, as humbly as conscientiously; and thus I leave it.

human being to be crushed under any calamity like a blindworm under a stone.

For lesser evils, the fact that our interest gradually take a wider range, allows more scope for the healing power of compensation. Also our strongest idiosyncrasies, our loves, hates, sympathies, and prejudices, having assumed a more rational and softened shape, we do not present so many angles for the rough attrition of the world. Likewise, with the eye of that Faith already referred to, we have come to view life in its entirety, instead of agonisingly puzzling over its disjointed parts, which are not, and were never meant to be, made wholly clear to mortal eye. And that calm twilight, which by nature's kindly law so soon begins to creep over the past, throws over all things a softened colouring which altogether transcends and forbids regret. I suppose there is hardly any woman with a good heart and a clear conscience, who does not feel, on the whole, the infinite truth of the verses at the head of this paper, and of the other two verses which I here add — partly because a pleasant rhyme is a wholesome thing to cling about the memory, and partly in the hope that some one may own or claim this anonymous song: —

" 'Do ye think of the hopes that are gone, Jeanie,
As ye sit by your fire at night?
Do ye gather them up as they faded fast
Like buds with an early blight?'
'I think of the hopes that are gone. Robin,
And I mourn not their stay was fleet;
For they fell as the leaves of the red rose fall,
And were even in falling, sweet.'

'Do ye think of the friends that are gone, Jeanie',
As ye sit by your fire at night?
Do ye wish they were round you again once more
By the hearth that they made so bright?'
'I think of the friends that are gone, Robin,
They are dear to my heart as then:
But the best and the dearest among them all
I have never wished back again!'" *

Added to all these reasons, contentment, faith, cheerfulness, and the natural calming down of both passions and emotions, which give a woman greater capacity for usefulness in middle life than in any previous portion of her existence, is another — her greater independence. By the time she has arrived at the half of those three-score-years-and-ten which form the largest available limit of active life, she will generally have become, in the best sense of the term, her own mistress. I do not mean as regards exemption from family ties and restrictions, for this sort of liberty is sadder than bondage, but she will be mistress over

* I have since learnt that this poem is by Dora Greenwell.

who has had her fair share of both love and liking, must learn and show by her demeanour she has learned that the only way to preserve the unfeigned respect of the opposite sex, is by letting them see that she can do without either their attention or their admiration.

Another source of contentment, which in youth's fierce self-dependence it would be vain to look for — is the recognition of one's own comparative unimportance and helplessness in the scale of fate. We begin by thinking we can do everything, and that everything rests with us to do; the merest trifle frets and disturbs us; the restless heart wearies itself with anxieties over its own future, the tender one over the futures of those dear to it. Many a young face do I see wearing the indescribable *Martha*-look — "troubled about many things" — whom I would fain remind of the anecdote of the ambassador in China. To him, tossing sleepless on his bed, his old servant said:

"Sir, may I put to you, and will you answer, three questions? First, did not the Almighty govern this world very well before you came into it?"

"Of course."

"And will He not also do the same when you are gone out of it?"

"I know that."

"Then, do you not think, sir, that He is able to govern it while you are in it?"

The ambassador smiled assent, turned round, and slept calmly.

Alas! it is the slowest and most painful lesson that Faith has to learn — Faith, not Indifference — to do steadfastly and patiently all that lies to her hand; and there leave it, believing that the Almighty is able to govern His own world.

It is said that we suffer less as we grow older, that pain, like joy, becomes dulled by repetition, or by the callousness that comes with years. In one sense this is true. If there is no joy like the joy of youth, the rapture of a first love, the thrill of a first ambition, God's great mercy has also granted that there is no anguish like youth's pain; so total, so hopeless, blotting out earth and heaven, falling down upon the whole being like a stone. This never comes in after-life, because the sufferer, if he or she have lived to any purpose at all, has learned that God never meant any

believing that, be it great or small, it is not theirs either to lose or to waste, but that they must one day render up to the Master His own, with usury.

Would that, instead of educating our young girls with the notion that they are to be wives, or nothing — matrons, with an acknowledged position and duties, or with no position and duties at all — we could instil into them the principle that, above and before all, they are to be *women* — women, whose character is of their own making, and whose lot lies in their own hands. Not through any foolish independence of mankind, or adventurous misogamy: let people prate as they will, the woman was never born yet who would not cheerfully and proudly give herself and her whole destiny into a worthy hand, at the right time, and under fitting circumstances — that is, when her whole heart and conscience accompanied and sanctified the gift. But marriage ought always to be a question not of necessity, but choice. Every girl ought to be taught that a hasty, loveless union, stamps upon her as foul dishonour as one of those connexions which omit the legal ceremony altogether; and that, however pale, dreary, and toilsome a single life may be, unhappy married life must be tenfold worse --- an ever-haunting temptation, an in-

curable regret, a torment from which there is no escape but death. There is many a bridal-chamber over which ought to be placed no other inscription than that well-known one over the gate of Dante's hell:

"Lasciate ogni speranza, voi chi entrate."

God forbid that any woman, in whose heart is any sense of real marriage, with all its sanctity, beauty, and glory, should ever be driven to enter such an accursed door!

But after the season of growing old, there comes, to a few, the time of old age; the withered face, the failing strength, the bodily powers gradually sinking into incapacity for both usefulness and enjoyment. I will not say but that this season has its sad aspect to a woman who has never married; and who, as her own generation dies out, probably has long since died out, retains no longer, nor can expect to retain, any flesh-and-blood claim upon a single human being. When all the downward ties which give to the decline of life a rightful comfort, and the interest in the new generation which brightens it with a perpetual hope, are to her either unknown, or indulged in chiefly on one side. Of course there are exceptions; where an

herself — she will have learned to understand herself, mentally and bodily. Nor is this last a small advantage, for it often takes years to comprehend, and act upon when comprehended, the physical peculiarities of one's own constitution. Much valetudinarianism among women arises from ignorance or neglect of the commonest sanitary laws; and indifference to that grand preservative of a healthy body, a well-controlled, healthy mind. Both of these are more attainable in middle age than youth; and, therefore, the sort of happiness they bring — a solid, useful, available happiness — is more in her power then, than at any earlier period.

And why? Because she has ceased to think principally of herself and her own pleasures; because, as I tried to show in a former chapter, happiness itself has become to her an accidental thing, which the good God may give or withhold as He sees most fit for her — most adapted to the work for which He means to use her in her generation. This conviction of being at once an active and a passive agent — selfworking, worked through, and worked upon — is surely consecration enough to form the peace, nay, the happiness, of any good woman's life: enough, be it ever so solitary, to sustain it until the end.

In what manner such a conviction should be carried out, no one individual can venture to advise. Women's work is, in this age, if undefined, almost unlimited, when the woman herself so chooses. She alone can be a law unto herself, deciding, acting according to the circumstances in which her lot is placed.

And have we not many who do so act? Women of property, whose name is a proverb for generous and wise charities — whose riches, carefully guided, flow into innumerable channels, freshening the whole land. Women of rank and influence, who use both, or lay aside both, in the simplest humility, for labours of love which level, or rather raise, all classes to one common sphere of womanhood. And many others, of whom the world knows nothing, who have taken the wisest course that any unmarried woman can take, and made for themselves a home and a position: some, as the ladies Bountiful of a country neighbourhood; some, as elder sisters, on whom has fallen the bringing up of whole families and to whom has tacitly been accorded the headship of the same, by the love and respect of more than one generation thereof; and some as writers, painters, and professional women generally, who make the most of the special gift apparently allotted to them,

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aunt has been almost like a mother, and a loving and loveable great-aunt is as important a personage as any grandmother. But I speak of things in general. It is a condition to which a single woman must make up her mind, that the close of her days will be more or less solitary.

Yet there is a solitude which old age feels to be as natural and satisfying as that rest which seems such an irksomeness to youth, but which gradually grows into the best blessing of our lives; and there is another solitude, so full of peace and hope, that it is like Jacob's sleep in the wilderness, at the foot of the ladder of angels.

"All things are less dreadful than they seem."

And it may be that the extreme loneliness which, viewed afar off, appears to an unmarried woman as one of the saddest of the inevitable results of her lot, shall by that time have lost all its pain, and be regarded but as the quiet, dreamy hour "between the lights;" when the day's work is done, and we lean back, closing our eyes, to think it all over before we finally go to rest, or to look forward, in faith and hope, unto the Coming Morning.

A finished life — a life which has made the best

of all the materials granted to it, and through which, be its web dark or bright, its pattern clear or clouded, can now be traced plainly the hand of the Great Designer; surely this is worth living for? And though at its end it may be somewhat lonely; though a servant's and not a daughter's arm may guide the failing step; though most likely it will be strangers only who come about the dying bed, close the eyes that no husband ever kissed, and draw the shroud kindly over the poor withered breast where no child's head has ever lain; still, such a life is not to be pitied, for it is a completed life. It has fulfilled its appointed course, and returns to the Giver of all breath, pure as He gave it. Nor will He forget it when He counteth up His jewels.

On earth, too, for as much and as long as the happy dead, to whom all things have long been made equal, need remembering, such a life will not have been lived in vain:

> "Only the memory of the just
> Smells sweet, and blossoms in the dust."

THE END.

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